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LECTURES  
ON THE  
HISTORY OF LITERATURE.

EDINBURGH : BALLANTYNE AND HUGHES,  
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LECTURES  
ON THE  
HISTORY OF LITERATURE  
ANCIENT AND MODERN

FROM THE GERMAN OF  
FREDERICK SCHLEGEL

///

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# LECTURES

ON THE

## HISTORY OF LITERATURE.

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### LECTURE I.

INTRODUCTION AND PLAN OF THE WORK—INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE ON LIFE  
AND ON THE CHARACTER OF NATIONS — POETRY OF THE GREEKS DOWN TO  
THE AGE OF SOPHOCLES.

IN the following discourses, it is my design to give a general view of the development and of the spirit of literature among the most illustrious nations of ancient as well as of modern times ; but my principal object is to represent literature as it has exerted its influence on the affairs of active life, on the fate of nations, and on the progressive character of ages.

During the last hundred years, the human mind, more particularly in Germany, has undergone a great, and, in one point of view at least, a fortunate alteration. Not that the individual productions of art, or inquiries into science, to which this period has given birth, are entitled to indiscriminate praise, or have attained equal success ; but a mighty change has taken place in the quarter where it was most necessary, in the regard and interest which the world at large bestows on literature ; and among us, above all other people, in the influence which it has already

exerted, and is likely in a much greater degree to exert on us, both as individuals and as a nation.

Our men of letters formed, till of late, a body altogether cut off from the rest of the world, and quite as distinct from the society of the higher orders as these were from the mass of the people. Kepler and Leibnitz composed far the greater part of their works in Latin; and Frederick of Prussia, in his turn, both of thinking and of writing, was a Frenchman. All national recollections, and all national feelings, were either abandoned to the common people, who still maintained among them some remnant, however feeble and mutilated, of the spirit of "the good old time;" or formed in secret the inspiration and the enthusiastic pursuit of a few poets and authors, who at first, indeed, applied themselves to these objects in the hope of bringing about a new state of things by their means. So long, however, as this was alone attempted by some particular classes of society, there could be little chance that the youthful enthusiasm of their design should be justified by success, or crowned by consequences of universal utility.

During the whole of the latter part of the seventeenth, and the first half of the eighteenth century, this complete separation between the men of letters and the people of fashion, and between them and the rest of the nation, was universal throughout Germany; and, indeed, these unnatural distinctions and their necessary consequences protracted no inconsiderable influence in particular quarters, long after the general mind had become sufficiently prepared for the reception of a new state of things, and a more rational arrangement of society.

The great number of distinguished works, or at least of remarkable and praiseworthy attempts, which, especially after the middle of the eighteenth century, were perpetually making their appearance in the German tongue, succeeded at length in attracting universal attention, partly to the too much neglected history of our country, and to the many beautiful traits of magnanimity and virtue which are

related in our ancient chronicles ; partly to the innate excellencies of our language itself,—the strength, the richness, and the flexibility which it never fails to display, when it is employed in a manner adapted to its character. The more that national feelings and recollections were revived, the more also was our love awakened for our mother tongue. That acquaintance with foreign languages, whether dead or living, which is necessary for men of letters and men of fashion, was no longer connected with neglect of their vernacular speech ; a neglect which is always sure to work its own revenge on those who practise it, and which can never be supposed to create any prejudice either in favour of their politeness or their erudition. The great attention with which foreign languages had been studied, was, however, at this period, of infinite advantage to our own ; for every foreign language, even a living one, must of necessity be acquired in a more exact manner than our vernacular tongue. Thus the mind becomes sharpened for the perception of the general principles of language ; and in the end we apply to the polishing and enriching of our own language that acuteness which we have been accustomed to exercise on others. It has become, in a word, the great object of general ambition to add to the strength and the variety, which are the distinguishing excellencies of our native tongue, all those other advantages which characterise the most cultivated languages of ancient as well as of modern times.

It is, however, my purpose to exhibit a picture, not of German literature alone, but of the literature of the European nations in general. There cannot, therefore, be any impropriety in anticipating the remark, that during the eighteenth century, the literature of many other countries underwent a change similar to that which took place in our own, and manifested the same disposition to resume those national characteristics, and that national spirit, which it had been the ambition of the preceding period, as much as possible, to obliterate. The example of England will

sufficiently illustrate my meaning. Even there, during the latter part of the seventeenth century, while the country lay exhausted and drooping under the consequences of the civil wars of Cromwell, the public taste became corrupted, insipid, tame, sickly, and un-English. The language itself was neglected, and the great old poets and authors were sinking fast into oblivion. But so soon as, by a fortunate revolution, the political independence of England came again to be displayed, her national literature also began to revive. The French taste, which the English had adopted, became every day weaker ; and they recurred at last, with redoubled affection, to the old poets of their country. It became an object of much study to preserve their language in all its strength and integrity ; a number of great writers arose ; and since that time, so strong and so unchanging have been their care and partiality for every monument and every relic, however minute, of British history and British antiquities, that, so far as this matter is concerned, we can reproach their national character with only the one glorious fault of a too exclusive admiration of their country.

A separation, such as I have mentioned, between the men of letters and the courtly society, and again between both of these and the common people, is destructive of all national character. It is necessary that the different natural-circumstances and situations of the various classes of mankind, should, in a certain degree, work together, before we can either attain or enjoy excellence in the productions of mind. Where was there ever any work entitled to be called truly perfect, in the formation of which the strength and enthusiasm of youth have not laboured in companionship with the experience and maturity of manhood ? Even the tenderness of womanly feeling must not be excluded from exerting its due influence on the works of literature ; because, when the character of a nation is once truly-formed, that noble sense of delicacy which is peculiar to the sex, may do much towards maintaining it in its

purity, and preventing it from overstepping the limits of the beautiful. There are only two common principles on which every work of imagination must more or less proceed,—*first*, On the expression of those feelings which are common to all men of elevated thinking ; and, *secondly*, On those patriotic feelings and associations peculiar to the people in whose language it is composed, and on whom it is to exert its nearest and most powerful influence.

That the formation of a national character requires a combination of all those powers and faculties, which we but too often keep distinct and isolated, is a truth which has at least begun to be felt. The learning of the philosopher—the acuteness and promptitude of the man of business—the earnestness and enthusiasm of the solitary artist—that lightness and flexibility of mental impression, and every fleeting delicacy which we can only find, and learn to find, in the intercourse of society,—all these are now brought somewhat into contact with each other, or, at least, do not stand aloof in such total separation as of old.

But however much literature has of late gained in most countries, by becoming more national, more spirited, and more connected with the affairs of life, the evil of which I have complained is yet far from being altogether removed. In Germany we may still, on many occasions, see literature and active life stand separated like two different worlds, having no influence on each other. If all the individual varieties of mental exertion and mental production (which we class under the common name of literature) be not in a great measure lost to the world, at least they are far, very far, from exerting their due influence on us, either as individuals or as a nation. Let us only contemplate for a moment the actual state of literature, but particularly those causes which are most powerful in their influence on literature itself, and on the estimation in which it is generally held.

It seems to be considered as a common right to all poets

and artists, to live only in the world of their own thoughts, and to be quite unfitted for the world which other men inhabit. Concerning the man of erudition, it is a maxim in every mouth, that he is a being of no practical utility. Every one mistrusts the skill of the orator, and imagines that he has the power to bend the truth to his own purposes, with the design of deceiving and misleading us. That philosophy is often more apt to lead an age wrong, and betray it into the most unfortunate errors, than really to enlighten and maintain it in the truth, is sufficiently manifest from our own experience and the history of the present age. Through the reciprocal animosities and complaints of philosophers themselves, it has become commonly known, even among the uninitiated, how seldom they are in good understanding with each other; and from this circumstance the opinion has gone abroad, that, in general, philosophical tenets exert no practical influence on those who maintain them, and that philosophers, like other men, more frequently accommodate their opinions to their desires, than their desires to their opinions. Yet nothing can be more irrational than to endeavour to bring into discredit the noblest struggle which it is in the power of man to make,—the struggle after knowledge in the investigation of truth—merely on account of the general difficulty of the undertaking, and the ill success or ill conduct of particular inquirers. There is indeed no occasion to wonder, that men, perpetually occupied with the weighty affairs of political and of active life, should consider the petty disputes of writers as a mere spectacle of amusement, neither very interesting nor very important. Even the countless number of books must produce, in the greater proportion of readers, such a feeling of satiety, that nothing can appear more completely trifling, superfluous, and unprofitable, than a new book, adding one more to the heap of authors whom they have already in their hands. In this sketch, however, I have omitted to notice, that in my opinion, writers of all sorts—poets, learned men, and artists,



are themselves the cause of a great share of that contempt of literature which is so prevalent throughout the world: for this reason, that they very seldom speak their mind freely and decidedly on the subject. But even if all the reproaches which are commonly cast on authors and their works were, on the whole, just and well founded, will any one deny that there are at least glorious exceptions to the rule—works both of learning and of genius, which, in relation to the world in general, to their country, and to the age, fulfil every wish that could be formed, and are in all respects absolute and perfect? And if this be so, why are men so slow to recognise the absurdity of this general neglect, which has no better logic to support it than that which throws the blame of partial and temporary abuses of literature on the essence of literature itself, a thing every way so great and so important? Or why do they persist in keeping literary men in a state of separation from the world at large—a situation from which so many of their errors and defects are, in all probability, derived?

But in order to discover with perfect clearness and precision the importance of literature, both in its original destination, and in the power which it certainly exerts on the worth and welfare of nations, let us for a moment consider it under both of these aspects. And, in the first place, let us regard the true nature and object, the wide extent, and original dignity of literature. Under this name, then,—I comprehend all those arts and sciences, and all those mental exertions, which have human life, and man himself, for their object; but which, manifesting themselves in no external effect, energise only in thought and speech, and, without requiring any corporeal matter on which to operate, display intellect as embodied in written language. Under this are included—first, the art of poetry, and the kindred art of narration, or history; next, all those higher exertions of pure reason and intellect which have human life, and man himself, for their object, and which have

influence upon both ; and, last of all, eloquence and wit, whenever these do not escape in the fleeting vehicle of oral communication, but remain displayed in the more substantial and lasting form of written productions. And when I have enumerated these, I imagine I have comprehended almost every thing which can enter into the composition of the intellectual life of man. With the single exception of reason—and even reason can scarcely operate without the intervention of language—is there any thing more important to man, more peculiar to him, or more inseparable from his nature, than speech? Nature, indeed, could not have bestowed on us a gift more precious than the human voice, which, possessing sounds for the expression of every feeling, and being capable of distinctions as minute, and combinations as intricate, as the most complex instrument of music, is thus enabled to furnish materials so admirable for the formation of artificial language. The greatest and most important discovery of human ingenuity is writing ; there is no impiety in saying, that it was scarcely in the power of the Deity to confer on man a more glorious present than LANGUAGE, by the medium of which he himself has been revealed to us, and which affords at once the strongest bond of union, and the best instrument of communication. So inseparable, indeed, are mind and language, so identically one are thought and speech, that although we must always hold reason to be the great characteristic and peculiar attribute of man, yet language also, when we regard its original object and intrinsic dignity, is well entitled to be considered as a component part of the intellectual structure of our being. And although, in strict application and rigid expression, thought and speech always are, and always must be, regarded as two things metaphysically distinct, — yet there only can we find these two elements in disunion, where one or both have been employed imperfectly or amiss. Nay, such is the effect of the original union or

identity, that, in their most extensive varieties of application, they can never be totally disunited, but must always remain inseparable, and every where be exerted in combination.

However greatly both of these high gifts, which are so essentially the same—these, the proudest distinctions of human nature, which have made man what he is—may be in many instances misdirected and abused; still our innate and indestructible sense of the original dignity of speech and language is sufficiently manifest, from the importance which we attach to them, in the formation of all our particular judgments and opinions. What influence the art of speaking has upon our judgment in the affairs of active life, and in all the relations of society,—what power the force of expression every where exerts over our thoughts, it would be superfluous to detail. The same considerations which govern us in our judgment of individuals, determine us also in our opinions concerning nations; and we are at once disposed to look upon that people as the most enlightened and the most polished, which makes use of the most clear, precise, appropriate, and agreeable medium of expression: insomuch, that we not unfrequently allow ourselves to be biassed even to weakness by the external advantage of diction and utterance; and pay more attention to the vehicle than to the intrinsic value of the thoughts themselves, or the moral character of those from whom they proceed. Nor do we form our opinions in this manner concerning those individuals alone, and those people, who reside in our vicinity, or with whom we are personally acquainted; but we apply the same standard to those who are removed to the greatest distance from us, both in time and situation. Let us take, for instance, the example of a people which we have always been accustomed to class under the general epithet of barbarian. So soon as some observing traveller makes himself acquainted with their language, this unfavourable

opinion begins essentially to be changed. "Barbarians!" he will say—"they are indeed barbarians, for they are unacquainted with our arts and our refinements, as well as with those moral evils which are so often their consequences; but it is at least impossible to deny that they possess a sound and strong understanding, and a natural acuteness, which we cannot observe without admiration. Their brief replies are most touching; and not unfrequently display a native vein of wit. Their language is powerful and expressive, and possesses the most marked clearness and precision." Thus, in all situations, and in all affairs, we are accustomed and compelled to reason from language to intellect, and from the expression to the thought. But these are only solitary examples in solitary cases.

The true excellence and importance of those arts and sciences which exert and display themselves in writing, may be seen, in a more general point of view, in the great influence which they have exerted on the character and fate of nations, throughout the history of the world. Here it is that literature appears in all its reach and comprehension, as the epitome of all the intellectual capabilities and progressive improvements of mankind. If we look back to the history of our species, and observe what circumstances have given to any one nation the greatest advantages over others, we shall not, I think, hesitate to admit, that there is nothing so necessary to the whole improvement, or rather to the whole intellectual existence of a nation, as the possession of a plentiful store of those national-recollections and associations, which are lost in a great measure during the dark ages of infant society, but which it forms the great object of the poetical art to perpetuate and adorn. Such national recollections, the noblest inheritance which a people can possess, bestow an advantage which no other riches can supply; for when a people are exalted in their feelings, and ennobled in their own estimation, by the consciousness that they

have been illustrious in ages that are gone by,—that these recollections have come down to them from a remote and a heroic ancestry,—in a word, that they have a *national poetry* of their own, we are willing to acknowledge that their pride is reasonable; and they are raised in our eyes by the same circumstance which gives them elevation in their own. It is not from the extent of its undertakings alone, or from the remarkable nature of the incidents of its history, that we judge of the character and importance of a nation. Many a nation, which has undergone in its time all the varieties of human fortune, has sunk nameless into oblivion, and left behind scarcely a trace of its existence. Others, more fortunate, have transmitted to posterity the memory of their influence, and the fame of their conquests; and yet we scarcely hold the narrative to be worthy of our attention, unless the spirit of the nation has been such as to communicate *its* interest to those undertakings and those incidents which at best occupy but too great a space in the history of the world. Remarkable actions, great events, and strange catastrophes, are not of themselves sufficient to preserve the admiration and determine the judgment of posterity. These are only to be attained by a nation who have given clear proofs that they were not insensible instruments in the hands of destiny, but were themselves conscious of the greatness of their deeds and the singularity of their fortunes. This national consciousness, expressing itself in works of narrative and illustration, is HISTORY. A people whose days of glory and victory have been celebrated by the pen of a Livy, whose misfortunes and decline have been bequeathed to posterity in the pages of a Tacitus, acquires a strange pre-eminence by the genius of her historians, and is no longer in any danger of being classed with the vulgar multitude of nations, which, occupying no place in the history of human intellect, as soon as they have performed their part of conquest or defeat on the stage of the world,

pass away from our view, and sink for ever into oblivion. The poet, the painter, or the sculptor, though endued with all the power and all the magic of his art,—though capable of reaching or embodying the boldest flights of imagination;—the philosopher, though he may be able to scrutinise the most hidden depth of human thought, (rare as these attainments may be, and few equals as he may find in the society with which he is surrounded,) can, during the period of his own life, be known and appreciated only by a few. But the sphere of his influence extends with the progress of ages, and his name shines brighter and broader as it grows old. Compared with his, the fame of the legislator, among distant nations, and the celebrity of new institutions, appears uncertain and obscure; while the glory of the conqueror, after a few centuries have sunk into the all-whelming, all-destroying abyss of time, is for ever fading in its lustre, until at length it perhaps affords a subject of exultation to some plodding antiquarian, that he should be able to discover some glimmerings of a name which had once challenged the reverence of the world. It may safely be affirmed, that not only among the moderns, but even in the later ages of antiquity, the preservation and extension of the fame of Greece were at least as much the work of Homer and Plato, as of Solon and Alexander. The tribute of attention which all the European nations so willingly pay to the history of the Greeks, as the authors and examples of European refinement, is in truth more rightly due to the philosopher and the poet than to the conqueror and the legislator. The influence which the works and the genius of Homer have of themselves produced on after ages—or rather, indeed, on the general character and improvement of the human race—has alone been far more durable, and far more extensive, than the combined effects of all the institutions of the Athenian, and all the heroic deeds and transcendant victories of the Macedonian. In truth, if Solon and Alexander still continue to be glorious

and immortal names, their glory and immortality are to be traced rather to the influence which, by certain accidents, their genius has exerted on the intellectual character and progress of the species, than to the intrinsic value of a system of municipal laws altogether discrepant from our own, or to the establishment of a few dynasties which have long since passed away.

We must not, indeed, expect to find many poets or many philosophers whose genius or whose celebrity have in any degree entitled them to be compared with Homer and Plato. But wherever one is to be found, he, like them, is deservedly valued by posterity as a solitary light in the midst of darkness, a sure index and a common standard, by which we may form an estimate of the intellectual power and refinement of the age and nation which gave him birth.

If to these high advantages of a national poetry and national traditions, of a history abounding in subjects of meditation, of refined art, and profound science, we add the gifts of eloquence, of wit, and of a language of society adapted to all the ends of elegant intercourse, but not abused to the purposes of immorality; we have filled up the picture of a polished and intellectual people, and we have a full view of what a perfect and comprehensive literature ought to be.

Animated as I am by the wish to represent literature in all its importance, and in all the influence which it exerts on the affairs of mankind, I am far from being insensible to the difficulties of the task which I have undertaken. I am well aware that, on one hand, from my desire to be brief and comprehensive, I may be in danger of passing over many things in a cursory, and perhaps an incidental manner, which might well deserve the fullest explanation and detail; while, on the other hand, from my anxiety to establish the justice of my opinions by a reference to historical facts, I may be apt to dwell on particular points to a length which, by those who have not made literature the



great business of their lives, may be esteemed useless and unprofitable. I am, however, encouraged to proceed in my attempt by the long intimacy in which I have lived with many departments of literature. The ground, indeed, is so rich and so extensive, that no one who is at all acquainted with its nature can be in much danger of believing himself to have exhausted it. But my familiarity with a subject which has occupied almost the whole of my life, may perhaps be no inadequate preparation for giving a comprehensive sketch of literature as a whole. It should at least enable me to distinguish, with some precision, between what is useful only as a step to something further, and what possesses in itself the importance of an end; as well as between those results whose value can be estimated only by the learned, and those which possess qualities calculated to render them interesting in the eyes of the world at large.

The whole of our mental refinement is in so great a degree derived from that of the ancients, that it would be extremely difficult to treat of literature in any way, without bestowing at least a few introductory observations on the writers of Greece and Rome. It would, above all things, be impossible to draw a picture of the progress of literature in general, or to form any estimate of the relative merits of the works which have appeared in our own time, without having previously described, in some sort, the peculiar excellencies of the great masterpieces of antiquity. The history of Greece, beyond that of any other country, affords the most striking illustration of the strength and beauty to which literature may attain, when its progress is fostered by the public care of an ingenious and lively people; and, in a different period of the same eventful story, the poisonous influence and destructive consequences of a sophistical eloquence, are displayed with a power and a clearness for which we should elsewhere seek in vain.

The view which I propose to take of antiquity shall, how-



ever, be short and compressed, however much I might be tempted to extend my account of the literature of nations to whom we are indebted for so large a share of our mental cultivation, and from whom we have derived so rich a legacy of models, in every department both of letters and of art. In the same brief manner I shall notice what the literature of Europe has derived from the oriental nations, whether in the more remote ages of antiquity, or during the flourishing period of Greece and Rome, or in consequence of the intimate connexions which have subsisted between Europe and Asia in modern times. It is true that, were I to write in a manner strictly chronological, the ancient monuments of Asiatic and Egyptian genius would come to be considered before those of the Greeks. But as it is my principal object to give a historical view of our European refinement, and to represent literature as influencing the affairs of active life, I apprehend I shall act more suitably to my design, if I postpone my account of those matters in which we have been indebted to the genius of the East, till I come to treat of that period in our history when these first began to have a considerable share in the formation of the intellectual character of the Europeans. I shall then with particular attention review the antiquities of our northern ancestors, and the mythology of the Goths, together with the poetry and fiction of chivalry which are derived from these sources. The influence of the Crusades, and the effects of the intercourse which at that period took place between the Franks and the Saracenic nations, will come next to be considered. In the remaining lectures, I shall describe the period which has elapsed since the revival of letters, and conclude with a full and particular review of the literature of the eighteenth century.

In the mean time, should I be so fortunate, while I am occupied with the history of ancient literature, as to show some things which are well known, and have been often treated by preceding writers, in a new light and a new connexion, I hope I shall have the greater chance of meeting

with a patient hearing, when, in the progress of my labours, I shall sometimes venture to try the productions of later ages, and more particularly those of our own times, by the test of principles which are, in my opinion, well entitled to respect and admiration, although they may not unfrequently appear to be totally in opposition to the acknowledged canons of ancient criticism.

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IN addition to the reasons which I have already assigned for beginning my account of literature in general with a description of that of the Greeks, I may notice, that they are the only people who can be said to have, in almost every respect, created their own literature; and the excellence of whose attainments stands almost entirely unconnected with the previous cultivation of any other nations. This is what we can by no means assert either of the Roman literature, or of that of the modern nations of Europe. It is indeed true, according to their own testimony, that the Greeks derived their alphabet from the Phœnicians; and the first principles of architecture and mathematical sciences, as well as many detached ideas of their philosophers, and many of the useful arts of life, from the Egyptians or the early inhabitants of Asia. Their oldest traditions and poems, moreover, have many points of resemblance to the most ancient remains of the Asiatic nations. But all this amounts to nothing more than a few scattered hints or mutilated recollections; and may, indeed, be all referred to the common origin of mankind, and the necessary influence of that district of the world in which the mental improvement of our species was first considered as an object of general concern. Whatever the Greeks learned or borrowed from others, by the skill with which they improved, and the purposes to which they applied it, became thenceforth altogether their own. If they were indebted to those who had gone before them for solitary ideas, and uncon-

nected hints, the great whole of their intellectual refinement was unquestionably the work of their own genius. The Romans, on the contrary, and the modern Europeans, set out with the possession of a complete body of literature, and examples of high cultivation, derived from nations more ancient than themselves: the Romans receiving this rich legacy from the Greeks; and the modern Europeans being the common heirs of both of these peoples, as well as of much of the learning and refinement of the Orientals,—possessions which, till within the two last centuries, they can scarcely be said either to have appropriated to their own uses, or rendered more valuable by the additions of their own ingenuity.

There are three great incidents which divide the whole of the truly illustrious period of Greek history into as many different parts, and which also form three epochs in the history of the mental improvement of our species: the Persian war, in the first place, when the Greeks contended for the maintenance of their political freedom and independence, with united strength and success so glorious, against the overwhelming power of Asia;—the Peloponnesian war, in the second place,—a civil war between Athens on the one hand, and the Doric states on the other, which raged throughout the whole of their country for the space of twenty-seven years; in the course of which the arms of kindred tribes were turned against each other, and the political power of Greece was destroyed by the valour of her own children;—and last of all, the expedition of Alexander, by means of which the spirit and the empire of Greece were extended over a great part of Asia, like the scattering of a mingled seed, destined to give birth in after ages to a rich harvest both of evil and of good. A new Græco-Asiatic taste and turn of thinking were produced at this period, which formed a bond of connexion more close than had ever before united Europe and Asia; whose influence, indeed, has never ceased, and which at this moment exerts no incon-

siderable power over those who are scarcely aware of its existence.

Had the Greeks been unsuccessful in the war which they waged in defence of their liberty against the Persians, and had their country become at last a province of the great empire of Xerxes, their place in the history of the human mind must have been widely different from that which they at present hold. They must have remained stationary where the Persians found them; or, it is probable, they might have declined from the eminence to which they had already attained. It is true that, to a certain degree, they must always have remained an intellectual, and even a refined people. Like other cultivated nations which fell under the power of Persia—the Egyptians, for instance, the Jews, or the Phœnicians—they would have retained their language and their authors, and in part, it may be, their customs and their laws; for the government of Persia was, upon the whole, singularly mild, and by far the noblest and the best of all the universal empires which the world has ever seen. But the spirit of man never reaches, without freedom, that high tone to which it attained during the glorious struggle of the Greeks.

The whole happy period of the political history of Greece, as well as all the glories of her literature, occupy no greater space than the three hundred years which intervened between Solon and Alexander.

With Solon commences a new epoch even in the literature of Greece. Not only does the perfecting of lyric and the beginning of dramatic poetry fall within this period; it also gave birth to a crowd of didactic poets, who enlightened the opening curiosity of the public mind, and displayed, in all the beauty of verse, the fitness of moral laws, and the physical structure of the universe. It was then, too, that Herodotus carried at once to perfection the art of writing in prose. The freedom of spirit which Solon introduced and rendered durable, and the liberal education

which the whole system of his laws rendered indispensably necessary to the noble and wealthy citizens of Athens, soon rendered the state which had been enlightened by his legislation, a central point of illumination to all the republics of Greece.

This happy period ended with Alexander the Great. Demosthenes was born only one year later than the too successful conqueror who waged the last war against the independence of his country, and he was the last great writer whose works were addressed to the Greeks as a nation. The Greeks continued, indeed, long afterwards, to be a polished and a literary people. In Egypt, under the Ptolemies, they became a more learned and a more philosophical people than they had ever been in the days of their ancient glory at home; but they were no longer a nation; and with their freedom, their whole strength of feeling, and the peculiar tone of their spirit, were for ever lost.

Within so short a space, then, lies all that vast and manifold creation of productions, which, even to this hour, render Greece the object of universal wonder and reverence; a great spectacle, and well-deserving of thought; a period fruitful beyond measure both of evil and of good, and thereby doubly instructive. The whole history of the world can show but one more such spectacle of the real development of awakened intellect; but that we shall have full leisure to consider in the sequel.

With Solon the proper epoch of Grecian literature begins. Before his time the Greeks possessed no more than commonly falls to the share of every people who are blessed with a favourable corporeal organisation, while they are animated with the fresh impulse of a youthful society—traditions, which hold the place of histories, and songs and poems, which are repeated and remembered so as to serve instead of books. Such songs, calculated to arouse national feelings, and to give animation in the hour of battle; or to be sung at the festivals of their

religion; or to perpetuate the joys of a successful, or the rage and hatred of a slighted lover, or the tears which the poet has consecrated to the memory of his departed mistress—all these were possessed by the Greeks, in the utmost variety, from the most early period of their existence as a nation. Still more valuable are those songs of narrative, which express, not the feelings that seize and overpower an individual poet, but embody the recollection and the feelings of the people—the faint memory of an almost fabulous antiquity—the achievements of heroes and of gods—the origin of a nation—and the creation of the world. But even these are to be found in abundance among other nations, as well as among the Greeks. There is only one production, the high pre-eminence of which gives to the early ages of the Greeks a decided superiority over those of every other people—the Homeric poems, the still astonishing works of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These, indeed, are the work of a preceding age; but it is sufficiently evident, from the language, the contents, and, above all, from the spirit of these poems, that they were designed and composed within a short time (probably within a century) of the age of Solon. In his time, at all events, and partly by means of his personal exertions, they were first rescued from the precariousness and forgetfulness of oral recitation, arranged in the order in which we see them, and rendered, as they have ever since continued to be, the objects of universal attention and regard.

Solon and his successors in the government of Athens, Peisistratus and the Peisistratidæ, over and above the delight which they must have derived from the compositions themselves, were probably influenced by views of a nature purely political, to interest themselves in the preservation of the Homeric poems. About this period—that is, six hundred years before Christ—the independence of the Greeks of Asia Minor was much threatened, not indeed as yet by the power of Persia, but by that of the Lydian monarchs, whose kingdom was soon after swallowed up in

the immense empire of Cyrus. As soon, however, as that conqueror had overcome Cræsus, and extended his power over the Lesser Asia, no clear-sighted patriot could any longer conceal from himself the great danger which was impendent over Greece. The greater part of the Grecian states, indeed, seem to have remained long in their security, without foreseeing the storm which was so near them, and which burst with such fury on their continent during the reigns of Darius and of Xerxes. But the danger must have been soon and thoroughly perceived by Athens, linked as she was in the closest intimacy with the Asiatic Greeks, not only by all the ties of a flourishing commerce, but also by the common origin of their Ionic race. The revival of these old songs, which relate how Grecian heroes warred with united strength against Asia, and laid siege to the metropolis of Priam, occurred at least at a very favourable period to nourish in the Greeks the pride of heroic feelings, and excite them to like deeds in the cause of their independence.

Whether any such event as the Trojan war ever in reality took place, we have no positive means of deciding. The dynasty of Agamemnon and the Atreidæ, however, falls almost within the limits of history. Neither is it at all unlikely that much intercourse subsisted, at a very early period, between the Greek peninsula and Asia Minor; for the inhabitants of the two countries were kindred peoples, speaking nearly the same language, and Pelops, from whom the peninsula itself derived its name, was a native of Asia. That the carrying away of a single princess should have been the cause of a universal and long-protracted war, is at least abundantly consistent with the spirit of the heroic times, and forcibly recalls to our recollection a parallel period in the history of Christendom, and the chivalry of the middle ages. However much of fable and allegory may have been weaved into the story of Helen and Troy, that many great recollections of the remote ages were in some manner connected with the local situation



of Troy itself, is manifest from the graves of heroes, the earthen tumuli, which are still visible on that part of the coast. That these old Greek mounds or monuments, which were, according to universal tradition, pointed out as the graves of Achilles and Patroclus—over one of which Alexander wept, envying the fate of the hero who had found a Homer to celebrate him—that these were in existence in the time of the poet himself, is, I think, apparent from many passages of the *Iliad*. It was reserved for the impious, or at least the foolish, curiosity of our own age, to ransack these tombs, and violate the sacred repose of the ashes and arms of heroes, which were found still to exist within their recesses. But all these are matters of no importance to the subject of which I am at present treating; for although the Trojan war had been altogether the creation of the poet's fancy, that circumstance could have had little influence, either on the object which Solon and Peisistratus had in view, or on the spirit of patriotism which was excited by the revival of the Homeric poems. The story was at all events universally believed, and listened to as an incident of true and authentic history.

To the Greeks, accordingly, of every age, these poems possessed a near and a national interest of the most lively and touching character; while to us their principal attraction consists in the more universal charm of beautiful narration, and in the lofty representations which they unfold of the heroic life. For here there prevails not any peculiar mode of thinking, or system of prejudices, adapted to live only within a limited period, or exclusively to celebrate the fame and pre-eminence of some particular race—defects which are so apparent, both in the old songs of the Arabians, and in the poems of Ossian. There breathes throughout these poems a freer spirit, a sensibility—more open, more pure, and more universal—alive to every feeling which can make an impression on our nature, and extending to every circumstance and condition of the



great family of man. A whole world is laid open to our view in the utmost beauty and clearness—a rich, a living, and an ever-moving picture. The two heroic personages of Achilles and Ulysses, which occupy the first places in this new state of existence, embody the whole of a set of universal ideas and characters which are to be found in almost all the traditions of heroic ages, although nowhere else so happily unfolded or delineated with so masterly a hand. Achilles, a youthful hero, who, in the fulness of his victorious strength and beauty, exhausts all the glories of the fleeting life of man, but is doomed to an early death and a tragical destiny, is the first and the most lofty of these characters; and a character of the same species is to be found in numberless poems of the heroic age, but perhaps nowhere, if we except the writers of Greece, so well developed as in the sagas of our northern ancestors. Even among the most lively nations, the traditions and recollections of the heroic times are invested with a half mournful and melancholy feeling—a spirit of sorrow, sometimes elegiac, more frequently tragical—which speaks at once to our bosoms from the inmost soul of the poetry in which they are embodied: whether it be that the idea of a long-vanished age of freedom, greatness, and heroism, stamps, of necessity, such an impression on those who are accustomed to live among the narrow and limited institutions of after times; or whether it be not rather, that poets have chosen to express only in compositions of a certain sort, and in relation to certain periods, those feelings of distant reverence and self-abasement with which it is natural to us at all times to reflect on the happiness and simplicity of ages that have long passed away. In Ulysses we have displayed another and a less elevated form of the heroic life, but one scarcely less fertile in subjects for poetry, or less interesting to the curiosity of posterity. This is the voyaging and wandering hero, whose experience and acuteness are equal to his valour; who is alike prepared to suffer with patience every hardship, and to plunge with boldness

into every adventure ; and who thus affords the most unlimited scope for the poetical imagination, by giving the opportunity of introducing and adorning whatever of wonderful or of rare is supposed, during the infancy of geography, by the simple people of early societies, to belong to ages and places with which they are personally unacquainted. The Homeric works are equalled, or perhaps surpassed, in awful strength and depth of feeling, by the poetry of the north ; in audacity, in splendour, and in pomp, by that of the oriental nations. Their peculiar excellence lies in the intuitive perception of truth, the accuracy of description, and the great clearness of understanding, which are united in them, in a manner so unique, with all the simplicity of childhood, and all the richness of an unrivalled imagination. In them we find a mode of composition so full that it often becomes prolix, and yet we are never weary of it, so matchless is the charm of the language, and so airy the lightness of the narrative ; an almost dramatic development of characters and passions, of speeches and replies ; and an almost historical fidelity in the description of incidents the most minute. It is perhaps to this last peculiarity, which distinguishes Homer so much, even among the poets of his own country, that he is indebted for the name by which he is known to us. For *Homer* signifies, in Greek, a witness or voucher, and this name has probably been given to him on account of his truth—such truth, I mean, as it was in the power of a poet, especially a poet who celebrates heroic ages, to possess. To us he is indeed a *Homer*—a faithful voucher, an unfalsifying witness, of the true shape and fashion of the heroic life. The other explanation of the word *Homeros*, “a blind man,” is pointed out in the oft-repeated and vulgar history which has come down to us of the life of a poet concerning whom we know absolutely nothing ; and is, without doubt, altogether to be despised. In the poetry of Milton, even without the express assertion of the poet himself, we can discover many marks that he saw only with the inter-

nal eye of the mind, but was deprived of the quickening and cheering influence of the light of day. The poetry of Ossian is clothed, in like manner, with a melancholy twilight, and seems to be wrapped, as it were, in an everlasting cloud. It is easy to perceive that the poet himself was in a similar condition. But he who can conceive that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the most clear and luminous of ancient poems, were composed by one deprived of his sight, must, at least in some degree, close his own eyes, before he can resist the evidence of so many thousand circumstances which testify so incontrovertibly the reverse.

In whatever way, and in whatever century, the Homeric poems might be created and fashioned, they place before us a time when the heroic age was on the decline, or had perhaps already gone by. For there are two different worlds, which both exist together in the compositions of Homer: the world of marvels and tradition—which still, however, appears to be near and lively before the eyes of the poet; and the living circumstances and present concerns of the world which produced the poet himself. This commingling of the present and the past, (by which the first is adorned, and the second illustrated,) lends, in a pre-eminent degree, to the Homeric poems, that charm which is so peculiarly their characteristic. Of old the whole of Greece was ruled by kings who claimed descent from the heroic races. This is still the case in the world of Homer. Very soon, however, after his time, the regal form of government was entirely laid aside, and every people which had power enough to be independent, erected itself into a little republic. This change in the government of states, and the condition of their citizens, must have had a tendency to render the relations of society every day more and more prosaic. The old heroic tales must have, by degrees, become foreign to the feelings of the people; and there can be little doubt that this universal revolution of governments must have mainly contributed towards

bringing Homer into that sort of oblivion, out of which he was first recalled by the efforts of Solon and Peisistratus.

The Homeric poems are of so much importance in the literature both of Greece and of all Europe, and are in so great a degree the fountain-heads from which all the refinement of the ancients was derived, that I could not resist the temptation of detaining you at least a few moments in considering their character. It is, indeed, at all times my wish to confine myself to inventors ; and I shall not scruple to pass, with the utmost rapidity, over whole centuries of imitation. I pass over the whole period which intervened between Solon and the Persian war. This period was, indeed, chiefly occupied by weak imitations of Homer, or by attempts towards new exertions of intellect, and new species of writing, which reached not, till long afterwards, the full and perfect development of maturity. Besides, the works of the greater part of the poets and other authors of this period have entirely perished ; and they are known to us only by scattered fragments, and the criticisms of their successors.

The Persian war itself, which forms, in a political point of view, the most remarkable epoch in the history of Greece, is illustrious, even when considered in regard to literature ; and was distinguished by many great poets and authors, whose writings are still in our hands. Pindar, who was honoured by the Greeks as without exception the most sublime of all their poets, survived the conclusion of this war ; during which his conduct gave rise to the suspicion that his dispositions were not patriotic, but favourable to the interests of the invaders. Æschylus, the oldest of the great tragedians of Greece, was himself a soldier, and fought with heroism in many of those glorious battles—one of which he has celebrated by perhaps the most daring exertion of his dramatic genius. Herodotus, somewhat younger, was born only a few years before Xerxes undertook his prodigious enterprise against the Greeks ; and

when he read, before assembled Greece, the books of his history, (which do much honour even to such a contest as they record,) the great events which occupy his narrative were yet fresh in the proud recollection of his victorious countrymen.

The reproach which has been cast upon the character of Pindar is easily accounted for, by the aversion so frequently apparent in his writings, for that predominance of the democratic principle which gave cause in his time to so many violent commotions throughout Greece, and which occasioned in the end consequences yet more destructive; as well as by the evident partiality which he shows for the regal form of government, and that influence of the nobility which remained always so powerful among the Doric states. Monarchy and aristocracy, however, it is fair to observe, do not appear among any other people of antiquity in a light at once so mild and so illustrious as in the empire of Persia—a government which, in whatever way its power might be abused by particular princes, was on the whole founded on the basis of elevation of sentiment and purity of manners.

As a *Doric* writer, Pindar is doubly valuable to us; for he is the sole representative of the many that are lost. What we call Greek literature, and possess under that name in the great writers who have come down to us, is in truth only the literature of Ionia and Athens, and, if we take in the later times, of Alexandria. But at the same time when poetry, history, and philosophy were flourishing in Athens and the Ionian states, the Doric people (a race of Greeks so different from the Ionians in manners and government, in language and in modes of thinking) possessed a literature distinct and peculiar to themselves, the existence of which is almost the only fact with respect to it of which we can be said to be assured;—poets of every kind; a peculiar form of drama; and, after the time of Pythagoras, philosophers also, and other writers. Although all these have perished, we have still Pindar; and from him

we may extract at least some general idea of Doric manners, and, if we make due allowances for the ornaments and partialities of the poet, of Doric life.

Nothing can be more foreign to the style of Pindar than the elaborate wildness of imagination, and the artificial obscenity, which characterise the modern imitations of this great poet, and have from them received the name of Pindaric. If there be any obscurity in his own writings, it arises from the frequent allusions which he makes to things which are indeed foreign to us, but which were familiar and present to those for whom he wrote. While he is celebrating the victor in some games, it is not unnatural for him to introduce the praise of that heroic race from which he is descended—or of the city in which he was born—or of the deity in whose honour the games were held; and this gives occasion, without doubt, to some abruptness of transition. In truth, these festival songs can scarcely be called lyric poems; at least they bear little resemblance to what we commonly understand by that name. They are heroic or epic poems composed in celebration of particular events, which were not merely sung, but accompanied with music and dancing, and brought forward in a manner somewhat dramatic. The peculiar characteristics of Pindar are,—the lofty beauty and musical softness of his language, and his fondness of considering every subject in the most dignified point of view of which it is susceptible. The graceful repose of high-born lords, who, in peaceful times, and surrounded by happy dependants, passed a careless life in chivalric pastimes and contests; or listened, among the society of congenial friends, to the songs of illustrious poets, and the celebration of their heroic ancestors: these are the subjects which Pindar has treated with unrivalled excellence; and such is the mode of life which he ascribes, not to his beloved victors alone, and the Doric nobles, but to the gods themselves in Olympus, and to those whose virtues shall entitle them to participate in the glories of an eternal life.

The next great poet, Æschylus, was one of another kind, and animated with a spirit altogether different. The war-like, bold, and lofty sentiments of a soldier inflamed with the love of freedom, which are ever bursting forth in his poetry, place us at once within the circle of that feeling which might well be the predominant one of haughty Athens during the time of the great struggle which she so gloriously maintained. As a poet, he appears only in that form which is the first in dignity, and the most peculiar to Greece—the great form of tragedy—which he himself first fashioned and unfolded, although perhaps he never carried it to the fulness of its perfection. His poetry is pre-eminently powerful in the expression of the terrible and tragic passions. The depth of poetic feeling is in him accompanied with the intense earnestness of philosophic thought. A philosopher, well may he be called; and the reproach which has been thrown against him—that he had revealed in his poems the mysteries, or the concealed doctrines of the secret society of Eleusis—is a proof how much truth, in all things had been the object of his most earnest inquiries. In his spirit, the whole mythology of the Greeks assumed a new, a peculiar, a characteristic appearance. He has not been contented with the representation of individual tragical events: Throughout all his works there prevails an universal and perpetual recurrence to a whole world of tragedy. The subjection of the old gods and Titans—and the history of that lofty race being subdued and enslaved by a meaner and less worthy generation—these are the great points to which almost all his narrations and all his catastrophes may be referred. The original dignity and greatness of nature and of man, and the daily declension of both into weakness and worthlessness, is another of his themes. Yet in the midst of the ruins and fragments of a perishing world, he delights to astonish us now and then with a view of that old gigantic strength—the spirit of which seems to be embodied in his Prometheus—ever bold and ever free—chained and tortured, yet invincible within.



It is impossible to deny to this representation the merit of a moral sublimity, which is more glorious than any merely-poetical beauty of which tragedy can be the vehicle.

Herodotus, from whom we have our account of the Persian war, has been called the father of history. It is true that this work pretends to be nothing more than a chronicle—a candid and open narration of all the incidents which occurred in the neighbourhood, and made the greatest impression on the mind of the narrator; with which he has, moreover, interwoven whatever he knew from any other source, either of the world or of its history; and into which he has introduced, by way of episode, a description of his travels, including all the observations which he had made on the manners and customs of foreign countries, little known to the Greeks in general, but carefully visited and studied by himself. The number of his episodes, and the free and poetical arrangement which he has followed, have induced many critics to rank his work among the *epic* narrations of heroic actions. But, in reality, the truth, the simplicity, the clearness, the flexibility, and the unsought pathos which characterise Herodotus, are exactly the qualities which render an historical work perfect in its kind, and which, but for their rarity, we should all be ready to consider as the most indispensably necessary in that species of composition. He is the Homer of history.

To these three great authors whom I have attempted to describe, succeeded, although at some little distance of time, others of a rank equally exalted. The first is Sophocles. In every species of intellectual development (as in the visible gradations of the physical world) there is one short period of complete bloom—one highest point of fulness and perfection—which is manifested, at the moment of its existence, by the beauty and the faultlessness of the form and the language in which it is embodied. This point, not in the art of composing tragedies alone, but in the whole poetry and mental refinement of the Greeks, is the period



of Sophocles. In him we find an overflowing fulness of that indescribable charm of which we can perceive only rare specimens in the writings of most other poets and writers—but which, whenever we do find it, we at once, by intuition as it were, recognise to be the symbol of perfection, whether it makes its appearance in the structure of thought or the style of language. Through the transparent beauty of his works, we can perceive the internal harmony and beauty of his soul. It is worthy of remark, that in most of the old poets many traces are to be found of a peculiar knowledge, and just conceptions, of the nature and attributes of the Deity. Or if it be impossible that they had really these conceptions, (which seems to follow of necessity from what we know respecting the age in which they lived,) it were at least the height of injustice to deny, that the greatest and the best of them have anticipated, to a wonderful degree, those deep feelings of awe and reverence with which we, born in happier days, contemplate the revealed character of God. In none of the most ancient poets does this appear with more clearness and brilliancy than in Sophocles. In all countries it has been the fate and progress of poetry to begin with the wonderful and the sublime—with the mysterious majesty of the gods, and the elevated character of the heroic times; and ever afterwards to descend lower and lower from this lofty flight—to approach nearer and nearer to the earth—till at last it sinks, never to rise again, into the common life and citizenship of ordinary men. The region most favourable for poetry is that which lies in the middle, between these two extremes: while the magnanimity of the heroic time still appears natural and unsought, and while our conceptions of Deity, although still fresh and animated, do not stalk before us in the gigantic forms of supernatural strength and terror, but have assumed the milder and more touching character of human tenderness, serenity, and repose. This is the peculiar region and delight of Sophocles. With regard to the artificial structure of Greek tragedy which was by him

brought to its perfection, I shall have many opportunities of considering that subject in the sequel; and then more particularly, when I shall have to call your attention to the successful or abortive attempts of other nations to imitate, or naturalise among themselves, this great form of the art of poetry among the Greeks.

Euripides was the successor of Sophocles in his art, but not in his sentiments, which are indeed those of an altogether different generation. He was at least as much an orator as a poet; and accordingly as men judge favourably or unfavourably of him, is commonly styled either a philosopher, or a sophist. But in the school of sophistry he certainly was formed, and from it he has unquestionably borrowed many ornaments of a nature altogether foreign from that of poetry: a circumstance which is often dwelt upon with peculiar felicity by his unmerciful enemy and persecutor, Aristophanes. But before I proceed to describe, in a few words, this writer, and some others of the declining age of Greece, it is necessary that I should first explain, in a brief and general manner, by what steps, about the commencement of the civil wars and political corruptions of the country, the race of sophists succeeded in acquiring that wide, destructive, and subduing influence over the intellectual character of Greece, which they maintained without opposition till Socrates rose up against them; who, having brought back the perverted taste of the Athenians, as far as it was possible, from the errors of these pernicious teachers, became the founder of that nobler school out of which Plato proceeded.

## LECTURE II.

THE LATER LITERATURE OF THE GREEKS—THEIR SOPHISTS AND PHILOSOPHERS  
—THE ALEXANDRIAN AGE.

IN my first lecture I endeavoured, by a rapid sketch, to recall to your recollection the brilliant spectacle of Greek genius, as it flourished for a few years in all its power and pre-eminence. I must now set before you the darker side of the picture, and proceed to contemplate the effects of that principle of decay, whose operation is destined to follow so closely and so certainly after every period distinguished by the greatness of its inventions and the beauties of its productions—and which here also, when manners had become impure, and governments corrupted by means of a false and deceitful sophistry, succeeded in accomplishing the utter ruin of art and genius among the Greeks.

The first great writer who sets before us a view of this decline and corruption of Greece, as manifested in the incidents of her political history, is Thucydides. By the loftiness of his style, and the depth of his reflections, this author has secured to himself a place among the very first writers of Greece. His history is the masterpiece of energetic representation; such was the judgment of all antiquity concerning it; and on that account it was commonly said to be, not indeed a poetical, but a historical drama. And, truly, well might the history of that great civil war, which occasioned the decline, and ended in the ruin of his once flourishing, happy, and powerful country, appear to the historian himself as possessing all the life and interest of a fearful tragedy. The events which he has recorded are indeed invested, to our eyes, with an interest yet more mighty; for to them we can now trace consequences which

in his time could not have been apparent,—in them we perceive the causes of the decay and downfall, not of Athens only, but of universal Greece. Thucydides both framed and perfected that form of historical writing which is peculiar to the Greeks. The characteristics of his method of composing history consist, first, in the interweaving of political speeches, framed in a manner at once clear and elaborate—which introduce us into the secret motives and councils by which the political events of the period were governed—enable us to survey every particular incident exactly from that point of view in which it was regarded by each of the most opposite parties—and lay open the most hidden wiles of contending statesmen, with an acumen superior to what was ever exerted by the craftiest of them all; secondly, in an almost poetical, minute, energetic, and lively representation of battles, and those other external incidents which occupy but too great a space in the history of human affairs; and lastly, in the accumulation of all those highest excellencies of style, which can be embodied in the richest, most ornamented, and most energetic prose.

The similarity of their political institutions, and the equal weight and influence which was, under their form of government, attached to popular oratory, enabled the Romans to naturalise among themselves this particular species of writing with greater ease, and a success more perfect, than any other department of the literature of the Greeks. With us modern Europeans the case is widely different; our attempts towards imitation of the Greek historians have been in general lamentably unsuccessful. The relations of society among us are totally of another sort from what they were in the republics of antiquity; and oratory exerts no longer over mankind that imperative and often destructive influence which it formerly possessed. Above all, such is the effect of that immense storehouse of facts which we have it in our power to review in the collected history of the world, that we have lost all taste for

minute and poetical descriptions of battles, sieges, and other external incidents; we desire instead of these, short and precise sketches which carry us without any circumlocution to the point in view, and explain, in simple narrative, events as they really happened, with the true causes which brought them about. Herodotus, distinguished as he is by unadorned simplicity and beautiful clearness, possesses a much greater share of this expressive brevity, and coincides much more nearly with our ideas of excellence—or at least with the scope of our own attempts in historical composition, than Thucydides. He, accordingly, is the model of modern historians, and indeed, he was the model of Thucydides himself, who, however in some respects he may fall short of perfection, holds unquestionably the first place among the historians of Greece. His want of perfection lies neither in the arrangement of his history as a whole, nor in the connexion of its parts, for these are throughout dignified and exquisite—or, as was expressed in the universal encomium of antiquity, well worthy of a great historical tragedy—but merely in his style, which is somewhat massive and hard, and not unfrequently obscure. Whether it be that the last touch of the master's hand was denied, not to the latter part alone and the conclusion, but (as it has been conjectured by a critic of great discernment) to the general review and polishing of the whole work; or whether it be, that it was impossible, for one who composed before the expiration of the age in which the art of writing in prose was first created and fashioned—(more particularly for one who made use of a style so ambitious as that which was attempted by this prince of historians)—to reach at once the masterly eminence to which he has attained, without leaving behind him some traces of the laborious straining and toil which must have preceded the accomplishment of his daring undertaking; or whether it might not be that Thucydides found a style such as he has employed—sublime and masterly,—yet rough, and in some measure repulsive—the most suitable

vehicle for the dark contents of his tragic story—the fearful catastrophes, the decay and the ruin of his country—insomuch that he disdained to record and lament them in the language of elegance, but considered himself throughout the progress of his work (what he has powerfully declared himself in its commencement), as one framing a history destined to be a *possession unto eternity*.\*

While Thucydides has thus set before our eyes, and explained, in a general manner, the causes and progress of internal corruption in all the states and societies of Greece; Aristophanes, on the other hand, has painted the deep decline of *manners*, not only in Athens, but throughout all the republics of Greece, in a manner and with a power of which those who are unacquainted with him can form no conception, but the place of which could not have been supplied to us by any other poetical work, or by any monument whatever of antiquity. In this point of view, when considered as a document of the history of ancient manners, the value of his works is now universally recognised.

If we would judge of Aristophanes as a writer and as a poet, we must transplant ourselves freely and entirely into the age in which he lived. In the modern ages of Europe it has often been made the subject of reproach against particular nations or periods, that literature in general, but principally the poets and their works, have too exclusively endeavoured to regulate themselves according to the rules of polished society, and, above all, the prejudices of the female sex. Even among those nations and in those periods which have been most frequently charged with this fault, there has been no want of authors who have loudly lamented that it should be so, and asserted and maintained with no inconsiderable zeal, that the introduction of this far-sought elegance and gallantry, not only into the body of literature as a whole, but even into those departments of it where their presence is most unsuitable, has an evident tendency to make literature tame, poor, uni-

\* Κτήμα εἰς αἰῶνι.

form, and unmanly. It may be that there is some foundation for this complaint: the whole literature of antiquity, but particularly that of the Greeks, lies open to a reproach of an entirely opposite nature. If our literature has sometimes been too exclusively feminine, theirs was at all times uniformly and exclusively masculine—not unfrequently of a nature far more rough and unpolished than might have been expected from the general intellectual character and refinement of the ancients.

In the most ancient times, indeed, (as, even at this day, we can judge from the picture of manners which is unfolded to us in the Homeric poems,) the situation of women in Greece possessed a considerable share of freedom and respectability; if we compare it with that of the same sex in other countries, at a period equally early in the formation of society, we may even say that it was happy. But in later times the Greeks adopted by degrees all the tyrannical prejudices of their Asiatic neighbours, and, like them, devoted the whole female sex to total seclusion, confinement, and degradation. The republican form of government was, of itself, inimical in the highest degree to the influence and importance of the women; for its evident tendency was to fill the whole life and soul of the men with matters of public moment—with views which, whether they were just or false, and events which, whether they were real or fictitious, were all of a nature purely patriotic—and, above all, to engross the whole attention of each individual with the peculiar political tenets or prejudices of the sect or party to which he belonged. It is true that the situation of the women was not every where the same; on the contrary, it was extremely different in different states; and the several tribes which were included under the common name of Greeks, disagreed in this matter as much as they did in almost every other point either of manners or of politics. In Sparta, and in general among all the descendants of the Doric race, more particularly among those of them who had adopted the ethical



principles of the Pythagoreans, the natural rights and dignity of the female character were recognised infinitely more than in the Ionian republics. Upon the whole, however, it were in vain to deny that the Asiatic system of secluding and confining the women had obtained a very extensive influence throughout Greece—a circumstance which can, indeed, be easily traced in certain unhappy effects which it produced on the works of Grecian genius. In these works, however masterly in other respects may be their excellence, there is often wanting a certain delicate bloom of womanly tenderness and refinement—which is very far from being fit for introduction every where; than which nothing can be more utterly detestable when it bears the slightest mark of being far sought or laboured—but which we miss with no inconsiderable regret in those situations where it might have been appropriately admitted; to say nothing of the disgust which we feel when its place is occupied by vulgarity or coarseness, whether real or affected. Through this vice in their mode of life, the writings of the ancients in general, but most of all those of the Greeks, have not only been rendered less polished than might have been expected from people so distinguished as they were for refinement and urbanity: the contempt and depression of the female sex have wrought their own revenge by effects yet more positively injurious, and stained the whole body of their literature with a rudeness that is always unmannerly, and not unfrequently unnatural. Even in the most beautiful and noble of the works of the ancients, our attention is every now and then irresistibly recalled by some circumstance or other to this point, in which their morality was so defective, and their manners so perverted from the standard of their original simplicity.

Here, where we are treating of the decline of Grecian manners, and of the writer who has painted that decline the most powerfully and the most clearly, the consideration of this common defect of antiquity has, I imagine, been not improperly introduced. But when this imperfection



has once been distinctly recognised as one, the reproach of which affects in justice not the individual writers, but rather the collective character, manners, and literature of antiquity, it were absurd to allow ourselves to be any longer so much influenced by it, as to disguise from ourselves the great qualities often found in combination with it, in writings which are altogether invaluable to us, both as specimens of poetical art, and as representations of the spoken wit of a very highly refined state of society—to refuse, in one word, to perceive in Aristophanes the great poet which he really is. It is true that the species and form of his writing—if indeed that can be said with propriety to belong to any precise species or form of composition—are things to which we have no parallel in modern letters. All the peculiarities of the old comedy may be traced to those dedications of physical powers which were prevalent among the ancients. Among them, in the festivals dedicated to Bacchus and the other frolicsome deities, every sort of freedom—even the wildest ebullitions of mirth and jollity, were not only things permitted, they were strictly in character, and formed, in truth, the consecrated ceremonial of the season. The fancy, above all things a power by its very nature impatient of constraint, the birth-right and peculiar possession of the poet, was on these occasions permitted to attempt the most audacious heights, and revel in the wildest world of dreams: loosened for a moment from all those fetters of law, custom, and propriety, which at other times, and in other species of writing, must ever regulate its exertion even in the hands of poets. The true poet, however, at whatever time this old privilege granted him a Saturnalian license for the play of his fancy, was uniformly impressed with a sense of the obligation under which he lay, not only by a rich and various display of his inventive genius, but by the highest elegance of language and versification, to maintain entire his poetical dignity and descent, and to show, in the midst of all his extravagances, that he was not animated by pro-

saic petulance, nor personal spleen, but inspired with the genuine audacity and fearlessness of a poet. Of this there is the most perfect illustration in Aristophanes. In language and versification his excellence is not barely acknowledged—it is such as to entitle him to take his place among the first poets to whom Greece has given birth. In many passages of serious and earnest poetry which (thanks to the boundless variety and lawless formation of the popular comedy of Athens) he has here and there introduced, Aristophanes shows himself to be a true poet, and capable, had he so chosen, of reaching the highest eminence even in the more dignified departments of his art. However much his writings are disfigured by a perpetual admixture of obscenity and filth, and however great a part of his wit must to us in modern times be altogether unintelligible,—after deducting from the computation every thing that is either offensive or obscure, there will still remain to the readers of Aristophanes a luxurious intellectual banquet of wit, fancy, invention, and poetical boldness. Liberty, such as that of which he makes use, could, indeed, have existed nowhere but under such a lawless democracy as that which ruled Athens during the life of Aristophanes. But that a species of drama, originally intended solely for popular amusement in one particular city, should have admitted or hazarded so rich a display of poetry—this is a circumstance which cannot fail to give us the highest possible idea, if not of the general respectability, at least of the liveliness, spirituality, and correct taste of the populace in that remarkable state which formed the focus and central point of all the eloquence and refinement, as well as of all the lawlessness and all the corruption, of the Greeks.

This might be abundantly sufficient, not indeed to represent Aristophanes as a fit subject of imitation—for that he can never be—but to set his merit as a poet in its true light. But if we examine into the use which he has made as a man, but more particularly as a citizen, of that

liberty which was his poetical birthright, both by the manners of antiquity, and by the constitution of his country, we shall find many things which might be said still further in his vindication, and which cannot, indeed, fail to raise him personally in our esteem. His principal merit as a patriot consists in the fidelity with which he paints all the corruptions of the state, and in the chastisement which he inflicts on the pestilent demagogues who caused that corruption or profited by its effects. The latter duty was attended with no inconsiderable danger in a state governed by a democracy, and during a time of total anarchy—yet Aristophanes has performed it with the most fearless resolution. It is true that he pursues and parodies Euripides with unrelenting severity; but this is perfectly in character with that old spirit of merciless enmity which animated all the comic poets against the tragedians; and it is impossible not to perceive, that not only the more ancient Æschylus, but even his contemporary Sophocles, is uniformly mentioned in a tone altogether different—in a temper moderate and sparing, nay, very frequently with the profoundest feelings of admiration and respect. It forms another grievous subject of reproach against Aristophanes, that he has represented in colours so odious, Socrates, the most wise and the most virtuous of all his fellow-citizens: it is, however, by no means improbable that this was not the effect of mere poetical wantonness; but that Aristophanes selected, without any bad intention, that first and best of illustrious names, that he might under it render the Sophists as ridiculous as they deserved to be, and as foolish and worthless in the eyes of the people as he could make them. The poet, it is not unlikely, in his own mind, mingled and confounded, even without wishing it, this inestimable sage with his enemies the Sophists—to whose school he had at first, indeed, been conducted by his inclination, but whose maxims he studied, and whose schools he frequented in his maturer years, solely with the view of making himself

master of that which he intended to refute and overthrow—the utter vanity of whose doctrines induced him to begin the arduous attempt to revolutionize the whole intellectual character of his countrymen, and reinstate truth in her rightful supremacy.

Not only political institutions and private manners, but the art of eloquence itself, and all those branches of knowledge which exert themselves and are communicated by speech, and, in short, the whole system of thinking among the Greeks, were poisoned, and corrupted, and degraded by the spirit of SOPHISTRY, till Socrates turned back the stream of destruction, and guarded his country as well as might be against the danger of its future devastations. This indefatigable inquirer and friend of truth was a simple citizen of Athens, spent his days in the most narrow and limited situation of life, and had no immediate influence except on a small circle of chosen disciples and congenial friends; and yet his was a life of greater importance to Greece, and his name forms perhaps a more remarkable epoch in her history, than that of either the lawgiver Solon, or the conqueror Alexander. But before I can set in an intelligible manner before your eyes, this memorable struggle of Socrates, the regeneration of philosophy which resulted from it, and the subsequent entire renovation and exaltation of the intellectual character of Greece, it is necessary that I should first look backwards for a moment to the more ancient philosophy and popular belief of the Greeks, as well as to the commencement of that spirit of sophistry which sprung up between that philosophy and that belief, and was reconcilable with neither.

However conspicuous was the pre-eminence of the Greeks in every thing which relates to art and general cultivation, in every thing which belongs to the external appearance and sensible surface of human refinement, it is impossible to deny that those principles which formed the groundwork of all these brilliant and beautiful manifestations: the ideas of the Greeks concerning the nature

of the universe, concerning God and man, were far too material, and, in effect, if not despicable, at least unsatisfactory. The more ancient of the Greek philosophers themselves were, indeed, all of this opinion, for we find them perpetually laying hold of Homer and Hesiod as the most known and celebrated masters of the Greek mythology; not to approve of or praise them, but to ridicule in the mass their poetical theology; and to reprehend and condemn them, in the severest terms, for the unworthy, irrational, and immoral representations of the Deity which are contained in their works, and had through their means become constituent parts of the popular faith. To us, indeed, these poetical representations wear no appearance but that of a beautiful play of imagination, and as such they are well fitted to furnish us both with delight and inspiration; but if we reflect a little deeper on the matter—if we consider that these pleasing vagaries of fancy were really received into the popular creed as so many sober truths, and contemplate the necessary consequences of this, the use to which the herd of vulgar and unquestioning believers must have applied them—in spite of all our partiality for the bewitching poetry in which these absurdities are embodied, we shall have, I imagine, no great difficulty in adopting, at least to a certain extent, the unfavourable and condemnatory judgment of the philosophers: we shall at least feel and understand the grounds of their aversion. It is, indeed, very probable that they carried their enmity to poetry, which had been rationally enough commenced, much too far, and that they expressed themselves much too generally in their vituperation of poetical practice: for in truth the development of Greek genius was so diversified, that nothing was more difficult than to pronounce a judgment at once just and general concerning any part of their literature, more particularly in the early period of its history. However this might be, it is extremely probable that the poems previous to the time of Homer,—those songs which celebrated the labours of Hercules; the war of gods, giants,

and heroes ; the beleaguering of Thebes by the seven champions ; but, above all, the marvellous expedition of Jason and the Argonauts,—might have, in part at least, contained views more profound, and been founded on principles much more elevated, than the later heroic poems of the Trojan time. Some things in these more ancient poems might coincide much more closely with the remains of Asiatic theology, than any production of the Greeks, after their mode of thinking had been changed—they might even amount to positive recollections of an Asiatic ancestry. Such, at least, to give a single example, appears plainly to be the case with that beautiful piece of poetry which goes under the name of Hesiod, wherein the existence of an original and golden age of innocence—during which undisturbed felicity was the lot of men living in friendship with the gods, and themselves godlike in their lives ; next, that evil age in which strength and valour become the tests of justice ; and then the whole train of subsequent degradation and corruption among mankind—are all distinctly and orthodoxly set forth. In relation to these probably more profound and dignified conceptions of the most ancient poets of Greece, Orpheus is a name, although possibly fabulous, by no means destitute of meaning to the student of history : for it represents at least the name of some real poet who revealed and communicated to his fellow-countrymen, in such heroic songs as were best adapted for the spirit of his age, the holy symbols and mysterious secrets of these ancient recollections.

Whatever may have been the case in more remote periods, and of whatever nature the poetry of Orpheus may have been, these more dignified conceptions, of which I have been speaking, are altogether lost, or appear only in a few very faint traces, in the works of the Homeric age. In the *Theogony* which has been left us by Hesiod—a work whose authority was apparently very universally admitted, and which may be taken as a standard by which to judge of many similar works that have perished—these conceptions

are indeed sufficiently manifest ; but they are set forth in a manner too material and altogether contemptible. According to this poem the world is a mere appendix to chaos. To say nothing of the inadequate and senseless descriptions of the gods, nature is represented only in her character of fertility and fulness of life, and that under an immense variety of emblems, which commonly, however, terminate in the idea of some enormous animal. The life of the physical world, again, is, according to the doctrines of this poetical theology, represented merely as a perpetual circum-rotation of love and hatred, attraction and repulsion ; but we can scarcely perceive the least surmise even of the existence of that higher spirit which has indeed its proper residence in the intellect of man, but which even in external nature, at least in certain parts of her structure, breaks through and is made manifest.

In this theology there is contained, in fact, absolute materialism, not indeed set forth systematically with all the pretension of science and philosophy, but clothed in poetical form, and adapted to take fast and exclusive hold of the popular belief. Of Homer, indeed, we cannot with propriety say so much ; at least no such thorough materialism appears on the face of his writings. There is much more of it, however, than could have been wished in those altogether human representations which his poetical fancy has given us of the character and conduct of deities ; for in them we can perceive no trace either of what we, in philosophical as well as in common language, call religion, or of any other principle which might be substituted in its place. Not that there is any unbelief or scepticism, or any openly and contemptibly material conception of the divine nature in the writings of Homer : his defect is rather a total ignorance, or an incapability, like that of a child, for forming any adequate idea of God—diversified, however, here and there, as is the case in children, with an exquisite feeling, or a happy surmise, or a solitary flash of the truth.

According to the view which I have now been taking of



the matter, Hesiod must be entirely given up to the strong and well-founded reproaches of the ancient philosophers; but the judgment which we should form of Homer ought to be somewhat more favourable. Yet there is no difficulty in seeing what parts even of this mythology must have given offence to the moralists of after times; and it is not to be denied that, upon the whole—in a poetical, but much more in a moral point of view—his representations of the gods form the weakest parts of all his productions. If the Homeric heroes, in their size and strength at least, appear superhuman and godlike, it is equally true that the Homeric gods are of a nature infinitely coarser, and much more entangled with human infirmities, and in all respects less god-like beings, than the heroes in whose quarrels they engage. This may easily be accounted for, if we reflect that, in framing the character and actions of his deities, the poet did not, in all probability, consider himself as entitled to exert the ennobling power of his own imagination, but adhered as closely as he could to the relics of ancient tradition and the substance of the popular belief.

All the forms attributed to deities, and all the incidents which compose their history in the popular creed of antiquity, had originally some covert meaning, most frequently of a physical nature. Now, it might easily have been foreseen, that an attempt to represent in this manner physical objects and events under the guise of human beings and human actions, could not fail to terminate very often at once in absurdity and in immorality. Let us only consider the fable of Saturn or Chronos, who is represented as eating his own children. Nothing can be more odious than this, if we take it in its human or moral acceptation, and yet nothing more is intended by it than to set forth the perpetual decay and renewal of external things—the destroying and reproductive powers of nature herself. Hesiod abounds in similar fictions and representations, which become altogether senseless, improper, and vicious, the moment we view them without reference to their



original and physical meaning. In like manner, that symbolic meaning which was originally intended to be shadowed forth in all the corporeal representations of divine or superhuman nature, is extremely hostile to beauty in all the imitative arts. Let us take, for instance, the representation of a hundred-handed giant—a plain and obvious emblem of strength and enormous activity. In a poem we might find no great fault with this; and, indeed, we are familiar with its occurrence both in Homer and Hesiod; but our tolerance is only produced by the dulness of our imaginations, and the difficulty with which we form to ourselves any precise and lively idea of a thing described to us only in words. Were the hundred-handed giant set distinctly and substantially before us in a work of sculpture, we should be as much shocked with the deformity of this Grecian image, as we can be with any of the hideous and unearthly monsters which fill the gloomy temples of Jaggernaut or Benares. Or we may take any representations of a similar nature, however superior to the one I have instanced, both in spirituality and in dignity: we shall find the best of them almost equally inimical to the beauty of form. The Indians, for example, embody their conception of the three great exertions of the power of one Divine Being—creation, preservation, and destruction—in the image of a figure with three heads. In like manner, and with a similar typical meaning and purpose, the Brahma of Hindostan is represented with four faces, exactly as the Janus of ancient Italy was represented with two. All these symbolical images are hostile to the beauty of imitative representations. The art of sculpture reached, accordingly, far greater perfection among the Greeks than it ever attained among the Egyptians, merely because the former people did not adhere so pertinaciously as the latter to these ancient symbols, but were perpetually laying them more and more aside, in so far as they were chargeable with deformity: although they at no time framed their images of superior beings after mere human models,

but were ever solicitous to stamp upon the features which they borrowed from them the seal and impress of divinity. In their poetry also, the same thing may be remarked ; for it was uniformly attempted by all their serious poets, but most of all by the grand and noble lyrical poet on whose genius I have already commented, to soften down and polish away those rough and barbarous circumstances in their ancient mythology which are most offensive to a refined understanding. It is true that these circumstances were never so thoroughly disguised in their poetry as in their sculpture,—for the poetry of the Greeks was religious in its origin, and depended for its existence on that very mythology, of whose deformities, however glaring, it would have been hazardous, and in all probability quite useless, for any one poet to attempt the eradication. For this reason, even in those poets who are the fondest of representing deities as mere men, there are always some traces to be discovered of these ancient types. A single example from Homer (whose deities are the most human of all) will render this abundantly perspicuous. When Jupiter, in an ebullition of rage by no means inconsistent with his Homeric character, tells the assembled gods, that although they should fasten a chain to the heavens, and drag it downwards with united strength, they would not be able to move him from his seat—nay, that, if it so pleased him, he could by one touch draw them all up to him from the earth : at first sight this appears to be nothing more than a piece of rough and swaggering rodomontado, yet there is no doubt that in this passage reference is made to the chain-like connexion which runs through all things, and unites, in some sort, not only the heavens with the earth, and the earth with the sea, but the greatest and the most dignified with the weakest and the humblest of intellectual existences. So, accordingly, was this allegory universally explained among the ancients. A second passage sets the matter in a yet clearer light, and is even more disagreeable to our feelings, when considered only in its obvious and primary acceptation. In another

of these customary fits of passion, the father of gods and men desires Juno to reflect on the strife which she of old had kindled by persevering in her unmerciful persecution of Hercules, his favourite son ; and how, in consequence of that strife, the queen of heaven (which antiquity interpreted to mean the sky) had been suspended by her fastened hands, from the vault of the firmament, having each foot burdened with the weight of an anvil. It is probable that the poet, in this instance, did not shadow forth some mere allegorical conception of his own, but alluded to some individual and familiar hieroglyphical carving in one of the temples of his country. Passages of this nature, however, are of very rare occurrence in Homer ; and on this account many commentators either reject them as not genuine, or endeavour to furnish them with some different interpretation.

It was probably owing to these and other similar representations, that the great moralists of Greece entertained an unfavourable opinion, not of Homer only, but of poetry itself, and in their ideal systems of perfect legislation and government, entirely prohibited the use of that impassionating art. But the poetical application of these relics of a former time—of this imperfect, and, in a great measure, unintelligible system of symbols, must have been equally offensive to the moral writers, for another reason of an altogether different kind. In consequence of that universal vanity and ambition of the ancients which attributed the origin of all their noble and illustrious families to some hero, and the birth of every hero to some god, the numberless procession of these demigod-children ascribed to all the deities, but particularly to Jupiter, was such, that Ovid has entirely filled several books of his great poem with an account of the divine amours which gave occasion to their birth. All this, as I have already observed, is regarded by us as the mere display of a luxurious and delightful imagination, and we can scarcely conceive the possibility of any serious and pious belief having ever been attached to absurdities so amusing. But how could

the ancient moralists consider so lightly poetical fictions which formed the root and essence of the popular creed of their country—a creed, too, on which the whole internal principles, and exterior demonstrations, of moral feeling were substantially dependent? whose pernicious influence on the character of those who adopted it, was every day before their eyes, in the willing zeal with which their believing countrymen imitated the moral transgressions of their gods?

In so far, then, the reproaches of the old philosophers, if we set them in a proper point of view, may be both understood and justified. But, in truth, before we can judge aright of this matter, we must draw a line of distinction between Homer, individually considered, and the ancient mythology taken as a general system of belief. Homer, in spite of all his defects, (and we have already touched upon most of them,) has been the source of so much good both to Greece and to all Europe, that we cannot sufficiently express the gratitude we owe to Solon and the Peisistratidæ for preserving to us this great poet, whom the philosophers, had their opinions ever gained the mastery, would in all probability have brought into forgetfulness, as they have already done every thing that lay in their power to bring him into contempt. But if we consider the Greek mythology in general, and out of connexion with this prince of all ancient poets, we shall not be able to close our eyes to the fact, that it was not only defective in the particular moral ideas which it unfolded, but was, on the whole, and in the innermost principles on which it was founded, material, inadequate, and unworthy of the divine nature. It should not, however, be forgot, that these very philosophers, who indulged themselves so freely in railing against the poets and their mythology, had themselves, previous to the times of Socrates, scarcely ever made any inquiries into the proper nature of the Deity; and, indeed, very seldom advanced farther than certain vague and indefinite feelings of veneration for the elemental powers of

the physical world ; moreover, from being philosophers, they were very soon converted into sophists, and were, in that character, infinitely more dangerous, both in a political and in a moral point of view, than any of the old poets ever were, with all their ignorance and simplicity.

Not only the poetry, but the philosophy of the ancients, had its origin among the Asiatic Greeks. The same climate which produced Homer and Herodotus, gave birth also to the first and greatest of the philosophers,—not only to Thales and Heraclitus, who founded in their own time the Ionian school, properly so named, but also to those who extended the influence of its doctrines in Magna Græcia, and among the southern Italians,—as for example the poet Xenophanes, and the institutor of the great learned confederacy, Pythagoras. We are all accustomed to talk with wonder and reverence of the art and the poetry of the Greeks ; yet perhaps their genius appears nowhere so active, so inventive, and so rich as in their philosophy. Even their errors are instructive, for they were always the fruit of reflection. They had no beaten path of truth prepared for them, but were obliged to seek out and beat a pathway for themselves ; and accordingly they are best able to teach us how far men can, by the unassisted power of their own nature, advance in the inquiry after truth. But this philosophy is well deserving of a little further consideration.

It was the custom of the Ionian philosophers to reverence one or other of the elements as the first and primary principle of nature—some water, as Thales,—others fire, as Heraclitus. It is scarcely to be believed that they meant all this in a mere corporeal acceptation. They recognised, it is probable, under the name of the liquid element, not only the nourishing and connecting power of water, but also the general principle of perpetual change and variety in nature. And in like manner, when Heraclitus said that fire was the origin of all things, he did not surely refer merely to external and visible fire, but meant rather to

express that hidden heat, that internal fire, which was universally considered by the ancients as the peculiar and vivifying power in every thing that lives. Heraclitus, the founder of this doctrine, seems to have had conceptions of a nature more profound and spiritual than any of his brethren. But perhaps the incapacity of all these philosophers to set themselves free from the fetters of materialism, may be best illustrated by the example of Anaxagoras. This philosopher is well worthy of mention, for he was the first before Socrates who recognised the existence of a supreme intelligence directing and governing the whole system and concerns of nature and the universe; and yet he attempted to illuminate the world by recurrence to those minute and imperceptible elemental atoms, of which, according to the doctrine of materialism, the whole universe is composed. This atomical philosophy, which accounts for the creation of the world on the principle of mechanical attraction, was very early reduced to the shape of a regular system by Leucippus and Democritus; but afterwards it became, by means of Epicurus, as prevalent among both Greeks and Romans as it ever was among the moderns of the eighteenth century. This is that proper materialism which strikes at once at the root of the idea of a God.

It is in vain to suppose that these were mere speculations, and destitute of any influence on active life. The utter defectiveness of the popular faith of the Greeks, and of their philosophy, previous to the time of Socrates, will be most evident if we direct our attention to the opinions which they embraced with regard to the immortality of the soul. That indistinct and gloomy world of shades, which was celebrated by the poets and believed in by the common people, was at the best a mere poetical dream; and the moment reflection awakened, either sunk into doubt, or gave place to total incredulity. In the mysteries, it is true, or secret societies, whose influence was so extensive both in Egypt and in Greece, some more accurate and stable notions, with regard to a future life, appear to have

been preserved and inculcated ; but these, whatever they might be, were carefully confined to the small circle of the initiated. Both the earlier and later philosophers who sought to establish the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, had in general nothing further in view than the indestructible nature of that intellectual principle of the universe, whereof, according to their belief, every human soul formed a part ; they had no conception of any such thing as the continuance of personal existence. That doctrine—the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, properly so called, was first started and first rendered popular among their philosophers by Pythagoras. Even in his system, indeed, the truth was mingled with a considerable share of falsehood, for he embraced in its full extent the oriental doctrine of Metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls ; yet as it is, he is even in this respect superior to all the other old philosophers of Greece, and is well entitled to our reverence, both as a discoverer of truth, and as a benefactor of his nation. But his celebrated society (whose chief aim was certainly political power, and whose principles could not have been adopted without the total overthrow of the popular belief) was very soon dissolved ; and after that time the state of philosophy became daily more and more anarchical, down till the period of Socrates.

The contradiction and singularity of these opinions, invented and defended as they were with the greatest acuteness, and given to the world with the highest advantages of diction ; the spirit of doubt and unbelief, which it is the tendency of such opinions to spread abroad ; and the confusion of all ideas, and the relaxation of all principles, which naturally follow from their adoption, were perhaps never displayed in all the fulness of their destructive influence so manifestly as then. One great class of these ancient philosophers, however their opinions might differ on other matters, agreed in one thing,—that they all regarded nature only on the side of the mutability and variety of her



productions. "Every thing," said they, "is perpetually changing and revolving like the water of a river." So far, indeed, did they carry this principle, that they refused to believe in the existence of any thing steadfast and enduring; they denied that there could be any thing stable in being, any thing certain in knowledge, any thing universally useful in morals; in other words, they treated as a fable the existence, not of God alone, but of speculative truth and practical rectitude.

Another party who held fast by the tenet of an unchangeable unity in all things, fell into an altogether opposite opinion. They denied the possibility of any mutability in that which *is*, and were thus reduced to deny the real existence of the sensible world. These paradoxes they endeavoured to render popular by the highest exertions of dialectic skill; and in so far, at least, they were successful in their attempt, for the discussions which took place rendered doubt and uncertainty even more common than before. One of the first and greatest of these sophists commenced his instructions expressly and distinctly with the assertion that there is no such thing as truth, either absolute or relative; that even if there were, it could not be within the reach of human knowledge; and that even if it were known it would be altogether unprofitable. It would have been cruel, indeed, to deny this inquirer any private consolation which his DOUBT could afford him, if such had really been the poor and unsatisfactory result of a diligent and candid investigation. But these sophists were not content to enjoy their doubt in privacy; they had scholars and dependents in every district of Greece, and the education of the noble and cultivated classes of society was, for a season, entirely in their hands. Neither was the termination of their sceptical inquiries always candidly stated; for while some were honest enough to confess that they knew nothing, there was no want of other sophists who had the impudence and the quackery to say that they knew



all things, and who boldly professed themselves to be masters of every art and every science. It was, at all events, an easy matter for them to bring young men to such a pitch of accomplishment that they could, by means of a few turnings and windings of a sophistical argumentation, perplex and bewilder the understandings of others yet more inexperienced than themselves, and believe themselves qualified to settle every thing by the rapid exercise of their own more cultivated genius, much better than had ever been done by the once revered, but now despised and insulted wisdom of their forefathers. In these schools, it was not merely proposed by way of an exercise of ingenuity and acumen, to defend alternately two opposite opinions concerning the same subject, and endeavour to lend either, according to pleasure, the semblance of truth : the regular object of sophistical ambition was to defend on all occasions what they knew to be speculatively or practically wrong : to make the worse appear the better reason, not in scholastic disputation only, but in active life ; and to forge weapons of deceit for the destruction of their fellow-citizens. With a bold contempt of all those moral principles by which, according to them, the weak only allow themselves to be conducted and deceived, but which *they* in their wisdom were pleased to consider as the silly prejudices of childishness and folly, others expressly taught, that there is no virtue but that of cunning or of power, and no right but the right of the stronger, and the pleasure of him who has the rule. In these schools, not only was ridicule perpetually cast on the popular belief, which, with all its manifold defectiveness, was still closely connected with many feelings of a noble and dignified morality, which should have been carefully revered and preserved so long as men had nothing better to be substituted in their room—not only did they heap together loose, vain, and despicable dogmas concerning the world and its first cause—they denied, without hesitation, the very existence of a Deity, and

annihilated within their bosoms all perception either of truth or of goodness.

Through the prevailing influence of these opinions, the political purity of Grecian governments, which had long stood in jeopardy on the brink of an abyss of democratical lawlessness, was at last entirely overthrown : and sophistry had the merit of creating a spirit of corruption and debasement which neither party-strife, nor protracted wars, nor foreign bribery, nor bloody revolutions, had been able to produce.

In the midst of this universal atheism Socrates arose, and taught again the existence of a God in a manner altogether practical. He encountered the sophists on their own ground, and exposed to all the world the fallacy and nothingness of their opinions : he demonstrated to men, that virtue and goodness are not empty names ; and convinced them, in spite of their prejudices, that in their own hearts are seated many pure and noble principles, derived at first from a superior being, and giving birth to perpetual aspirations after some state of things more analogous to the dignity of their original. He laid hold of the best feelings of our nature, and linked them all with the cause of his philosophy. By these means Socrates became the second founder and restorer of a more noble system of thinking among the Greeks, at the expense of falling himself a sacrifice to his zeal, and to the truth. But his death is so remarkable an incident in the history of mankind, that we may well pause for a moment, and bestow on it some further consideration.

The solitary charge which was made against him, that he was guilty of teaching the existence of a new and unknown Godhead, and of despising the old and publicly recognised deities of the popular creed, was certainly so far founded in truth, and is most honourable to the fame of Socrates. Had the Socratic mode of thinking, which was in every respect new in Greece, ever gone beyond the circle of his own friends and disciples, and become the

ruling one throughout the country, there can be no doubt that the whole system of private life among the ancients, and at least a great part of their popular belief, must have either been entirely changed, or undergone a very considerable modification. This must have been thoroughly felt by the narrow-minded bigots of the ancient faith, and is quite sufficient to account for the deadly hatred which they all bore to Socrates, and the readiness with which they endeavoured to confound his great name with that of the profligate and pernicious sophists whose principal enemy he was. The charge, nevertheless, was in a great measure a mere pretext; and the true ground of their hatred lay in the nature, not of the philosophical, but of the political tenets which Socrates maintained.

In every situation of his life, Socrates had shown himself to be an excellent citizen and a zealous patriot; but his opinions, or at least those of the greater part of his scholars, were openly inimical to democracy. The manner in which both Xenophon and Plato often praise—almost with the zeal and warmth of political partisans—the constitution of Sparta, and that of every state in whose institutions the aristocratical principle was predominant, could have appeared only in the light of a disgusting want of national feeling, to the bigoted democrats of their native city. Besides, all the enemies of democracy who proceeded from the school of Socrates, were far from bearing characters so noble and reproachless as Xenophon and Plato. Even Critias himself had been a disciple of Socrates—Critias, one of the tyrants who ruled Athens by means of Spartan influence, and who, indeed, reduced their country to the state of a mere dependency on the government of Lacedæmon. And to this very circumstance it is that one ancient writer attributes, and with no small appearance of justice, the primary cause of the fate of Socrates.

It is impossible to explain, in any satisfactory method,

by what means Socrates reached those peculiar principles which he professed. With the more ancient doctrines of his countrymen of the Ionian school, he was well acquainted; but he seems to have considered them as, on the whole, inadequate and unsatisfying. On several remarkable occasions of his life, he had, according to his own account, recourse to a DÆMON, under whose guidance and tuition he professed himself uniformly to act; but whether he meant by this expression, merely the suggestions and resolves of his own meditative spirit and uncorrupted conscience, or whether he really meant something of a nature still more elevated, we have no means of deciding. It is equally out of our power to ascertain whether his private opinions pointed at a total overturn, or only at a partial modification and more rational interpretation of the principles of the popular belief. He appears to have been well acquainted with all the doctrines inculcated in the mysterious societies of his day. It is indeed true, that he was far from being altogether divested of certain opinions and principles, which the philosophers of the eighteenth century do not hesitate to rank in the same class of infidelity with the opinions of those all-knowing and all-doubting beings against whom Socrates was never weary of testifying. A single example will be enough to show with what unfairness and injustice this part of his character has been treated by some of these writers. One of their chief objections to him is founded on the reply which he made to a question put to him by one of his friends, on the evening of his death: "Is there nothing more which you wish us to do?" said the friend. "Nothing," answered Socrates, "except that I wish you to offer a cock to Æsculapius." So then, say these modern critics, the last moment of his life was spent in commanding a mark of respect to be paid to that superstition with whose worthlessness he must have been perfectly acquainted; or if it was a jest which he uttered, surely jesting was ill-suited for a moment so solemn. Perhaps if they had looked a little deeper, they

might have found a more rational explanation. By the constant practice of antiquity, when any person had recovered from an illness, he offered a cock to Æsculapius. Now, when Socrates expressed his wish to make a similar sacrifice, it is probable that he alluded to a notion which he himself entertained, and which has been illustrated at great length by several of his disciples,—the notion that the present life is given us only to prepare us for another ; or, according to the expression of antiquity, *that we may learn to die*. Besides, Socrates has often expressly said that he considered human life in general (and, without doubt, the state of the world in his day must have eminently tended to make him so consider it) in the light of an imprisonment of the soul, or of a malady under which the nobler spirit is condemned to linger, until it be set free and purified by the healing touch of death. To terminate life by suicide was held by Socrates—if not the first, at least the most distinctly of all the ancient philosophers—as a thing not permitted—as a crime against God and against ourselves. He made no attempt to emancipate himself, by his own hand, from the confinement and the malady of life. Perhaps he did not imagine, however much he must have been aware of the true dignity both of his own character and of the cause of truth and virtue in which he suffered, that that character and that cause would in after ages derive new reverence and dignity from the example of resolution and steadfastness which he set before his friends and disciples in the manner of his death.

In order to give a general view of the Greek philosophy, I have selected only a few points out of the great mass of their opinions: it has been my chief object to select those principally which may be traced in works not didactic, but historical—which have exerted the greatest influence on the affairs of active and political life, and from that circumstance are the most interesting as well as the most intelligible. I now return to my short survey of their most celebrated writers.

Xenophon is entitled, by his beautiful style alone, to take his place by the side of the best authors of antiquity. As a writer of history, he surpasses Thucydides, in so far that his narrative is more light and clear ; and that the feeling with which his story is animated, is more simple and natural. Yet so much is he inferior both in depth and in dignity of reflection, that, tender and elegant as he is, we almost universally give the preference to the severe austerity of his more manly rival. As a philosophic writer, in his account of the conversation of Socrates, he falls infinitely short of Plato, not only in profoundness of thought, but in richness of illustration, and in the arrangement of his materials. His political romance upon the life of Cyrus is deserving of much notice, because it is the only work of that kind which has come down to us from the ancients. The work is composed, in almost equal parts, of history, poetry, and ethics. But although each of the elements may be highly beautiful when taken by itself, the manner in which they are mingled together in the *Cyropædia*, appears to me, I must confess, very far from being a fit subject of imitation.

Although both Xenophon and several other writers of the school of Socrates, were conspicuous examples of simplicity and true beauty in composition, the sophistical rhetoric nevertheless continued to be almost universally prevalent among the Greeks. Isocrates may furnish us with abundant evidence of the wide extent to which that affected system of language and expression had been adopted by this ingenious and spiritual people : how they could endure to hear long harangues upon particular points or circumstances, selected at the mere caprice of the speaker, and often not only inapplicable, but utterly useless and unprofitable, to the total exclusion of every thing which might really bear upon the merits of the case : how, in short, they could make their reason altogether subservient to their pleasure, and listen to the discussion of matters the most important to themselves, whether as

individuals or as a nation, with feelings which might have better suited a drama or a show—as if the only matter on which they were to decide had been the relative merits of eloquence or wit in those who were so vain as to address them. There is an unvarying appearance of artifice in the system of speaking and writing which was at this period in fashion. Every word is laboriously selected and arranged; every syllable is placed with reference not only to its significance but to its sound; every period is rounded with reiterated touches, and the whole is polished with indefatigable care. Yet this taste in composition, this extreme refinement of language, may be of considerable use to us; for we are but too apt to fall into an altogether opposite error, and to destroy or diminish the effect of our reasonings by a very culpable inattention to the accuracy of our expression. The art which is employed in writing should, indeed, be kept as much as is possible out of view. The consideration of the labour which must have been employed, is sometimes distressing to us even in works of sculpture; yet, in general, we allow ourselves to be delighted with an inanimate statue long before we take time to reflect on the toil with which it has been formed. But the case is widely different here; the appearance of labour in a piece of writing is instantly and invariably disagreeable. We know that a poem or an oration is not to be hewn out of stone, and we expect to see in it not barely a skilful application of art, but something free, lively, and having influence upon life.

Plato and Aristotle, whom I consider in this place merely as writers, are specimens at once of the widest extent of Grecian knowledge, and of the greatest depth and dignity of reflection, which were ever attained by the Grecian mind. The first has treated of philosophy, in narratives and dialogues, with all the fervour of an artist; the method of the other is more scientific, in the strictest, as well as in the widest sense of that word: he has not confined himself to philosophy alone, he has treated of natural



science also, and natural history ; he has written on politics, on history, and on criticism ; and, in fact, reduced to a system all the knowledge of the Greeks.

In the narrative and poetical passages of his dialogues—above all, on account of his language and skill in composition—the general voice of his contemporaries, as well as of posterity, has set Plato at the head of all the prose writers of antiquity. The most striking peculiarity of his style is its unrivalled variety ; for it adapts itself with equal ease to the artificial abstractions and hair-drawn distinctions into whose labyrinths he pursues his enemies the sophists, and to the poetical, nay, the often dithyrambic boldness with which he sets forth the rich fables and inventions of his own philosophy. Considered merely as works of narration, *Phædon* and the *Republic* are entitled to be classed with the most illustrious specimens of that species of writing to which Grecian genius has given birth.

Both of these mighty intellects, Aristotle and Plato, have for two thousand years exerted a commanding influence on the character of the human mind, both in Europe and in Asia. But to this I shall call your attention with more propriety in some other place. Aristotle is characterised, as a writer, by purity and elegance, which began, in his time, to be looked upon as the first qualities of style. Although Plato has always been considered as a perfect model both in the power and in the construction of his language, and, in general, as a specimen of the highest point of refinement to which Grecian, or, more properly speaking, Attic genius, ever attained, yet there is no doubt that with regard to works of erudition, and the development and acuteness of criticism, but above all, with regard to every department of historical composition, the influence of Aristotle has been more determinate as well as more extensive than that of Plato. The immediate successor of Aristotle, Theophrastus—the same whose descriptions of characters have come down to us—and all the early philosophers of the Platonic school, were men of universal



refinement, and their writings were uniformly composed in a style at once elevated and beautiful. The philosophic sects which sprung up at a later period in Greece, appear to great disadvantage when compared, in this respect, with their predecessors. The followers of Epicurus make use of a careless, dull, and drawling mode of composition, while the writings of the Stoics are still more offensive on account of the bombast pedantry and technical barbarisms with which they are loaded. The decline of the genius of the Greeks may be traced, through all its stages, in the corresponding debasement of their language.

The revival of philosophy, which was effected by Socrates, was very far from extending its influence to the whole of the intellectual character of the Greeks. This happy revolution was confined to a few particular departments of thinking, and these were daily becoming more and more unconnected with the general spirit of that degraded people. On the poetry of Greece, to which we must now return, it exerted no influence whatever; *that* depended, so long as it deserved the name of poetry, on the mythology, the popular belief, the traditional tales, and the ancient modes of life of the country; after the national manners had become relaxed and corrupted, it exhibited merely a faint echo of what it had formerly been in the hands of those great and creative geniuses who have already passed under our review. But although in this later poetry we can see only the reflection of its ancient splendour; yet even the productions of this declining age are rich in particular beauties, and exhibit many glorious traces of that peculiar poetical spirit which seems in happier times to have been almost inseparable from the physical temperament of the Greeks.

The first traces of decline in the art of composing tragedies, may be discovered without difficulty in the writings of Euripides; rich as these are in pathetic representations and in isolated—above all, in lyrical beauties. The last among the great tragedians of antiquity appears less perfect

than his predecessors in many respects; but his principal defect, certainly, consists in a want of unity and connexion between the different parts of which ~~This~~ works are composed. I have already mentioned that the tragedy of the ancients arose, by degrees, out of a peculiar national chorus, and festival song of mythological import which was usually performed in certain solemnities of the Greek religion. The chorus forms in this manner an inseparable part of the ancient tragedy, whose composition is for the same reason, in its whole shape and substance, strictly allied to lyrical poetry: a circumstance which has been very powerfully felt, by those poets in particular who have endeavoured to imitate, in modern times, the peculiarities of the Grecian drama. Perfect harmony and agreement between the choral songs, and the dramatic part, strictly so called, forms, in tragedies composed after these models, a requisite altogether indispensable. Both are in the most entire unison in the works of Sophocles; but in Euripides the choral interludes assume a character widely different: they seem to be introduced into his plays merely by way of compliment to established custom; and, so far from being occupied with the events of the drama, are rendered, in general, vehicles for what has often no apparent connexion with them—the poet's own private opinions concerning the mythology and philosophy of his country. They abound, indeed, in lyrical beauties, which may be exquisite and delightful in themselves; but these are perpetually intermingled with formal dogmas which the poet had gathered from the schools of the sophists, and with long, pedantic, and ill-placed disquisitions, which seem to have no purpose in view but an ostentatious display of his skill as a rhetorician. In consequence of this harmony being disturbed, and the lyrical interludes no longer forming an essential part of the piece, the dialogue itself, which now composes the whole of the tragedy, appears at once poor and unsatisfactory. To remedy in some measure this defect, Euripides has recourse

to a perplexing intricacy of plot, to perpetual surprises and recognitions, to double catastrophes, and to wiredrawn intrigues,—which increase, indeed, the amusement of the spectacle, but can ill be reconciled with the true nature and dignity of tragic poetry.

The last Athenian poet, who represented human life in a manner new and peculiar to himself, was Menander—the inventor, or at least the perfecter, of the *new comedy* as it was called. His method of composition, although his own works have almost entirely perished, is in some measure known to us by means of the translations or imitations of the Roman poet Terence. The dramatic poetry of the Greeks, which had begun, in Æschylus, with the heroic greatness and marvels of fabulous antiquity, had now reached the last stage of its history: it had been gradually descending from the lofty images of a poetical *past*, towards the more humble concerns of the actual *present*; and it now terminated its career, with a spiritual and lively representation of all the circumstances, characters, situations, and intrigues which are to be met with in the everyday life of undignified men. Whether the representation of common life, or in other words, the popular comedy of Menander, belongs, properly speaking, to the class of poetry, was a question much agitated among the ancient critics. Many determine it in the negative, because, according to their opinion, not only versification, but mythology, is necessary to the existence of poetry. But, according to our ideas of poetry, the lively representation of human life, although this should be altogether unaccompanied with the marvellous, or even with the elevated, can in no way be separated from the region of poetry. According to modern critics,—the first and original end of all poetry—if we consider it as it is to have influence on men and on life, and, in one word, as it is to be national—is to preserve and embellish the peculiar traditions and recollections of the people; and to preserve alive, in the memories of men, the magnanimity and greatness of ages that are gone by. The peculiar

sphere of this poetry is epic narrative, where there is the utmost scope for the introduction of the marvellous, and where the poet cannot move a step without the assistance of mythology. But a second end of poetry is to place before our eyes a clear and speaking picture of common life. This may certainly be done in many modes of writing; but most powerfully, without doubt, in the drama. Poetry, however, such as deserves the name, can never consist entirely in representations of external life; it must always be intermingled with something of a higher nature, and have for its object the intellect and feeling of which that life is the symbol. Perhaps it might even be said that the essence of poetry, as directed to this second purpose, consists, in truth, in this, at first sight, unessential element of higher and more refined feeling with which the whole substance of the composition is apparently diversified, but really inspired. This feeling and inspiration form, indeed, a constituent part of all poetry; but in proportion as they come to be predominant qualities, the compositions in which they are embodied approach nearer to the nature of lyrical poetry.

The essence of all poetry may be said to consist in three things—INVENTION, EXPRESSION, INSPIRATION. In a great inventive genius, the other two elements, expression and inspiration, can scarcely be absent. But without any creative or inventive power, properly so called—most certainly, without any admixture of the marvellous—a work of intellect and language may, by the power of expression alone which it displays, or by the inspiration with which it is animated, fulfil the ends, and be entitled to the name, of poetry.

Menander was the last original poet of Athens who represented human life, and whose writings exerted their influence on human affairs. If we consider his comedies as the conclusion of Attic literature, the whole period during which that literature existed, reckoning from the time of Solon, does not extend beyond three centuries.

The poets who arose at an after period, when the language of Greece had become known over the greater part of the world, by means of the conquests of Alexander, and who attached themselves, for the most part, to the 'court of the Egyptian Ptolemies, are only to be considered as gleaners, who came after the rich harvest of Greek poetry had been already gathered in. These courtly literati—the academicians and librarians of Alexandria—have, however, been of much service to the world, in consequence of the labour which they bestowed on preserving entire the purity and clearness of the Greek language, as well as of the erudition and criticism which are embodied in their own works. As poets, they have all the defects into which learned poets are apt to fall: their mode of expression is rarely unaffected, and very often altogether obscure. Those of their number who attempted epic poetry, or, in general, who treated of subjects connected with mythology, are at least valuable on this account, that their works have mainly contributed towards enabling us, in modern times, to understand the allusions, and feel the force of the more ancient poets. It is, for instance, extremely fortunate for us, (especially as the writings of so many older poets who handled the same fable have perished,) that the chivalric expedition of the Argonauts forms the subject of one of the most elegant of these later poets—Apollonius. In consequence of the immense profusion of ancient poems which were at that time extant, it was perhaps easy for these Alexandrians to penetrate into the original meaning and connexion of the mythological fictions, more deeply than had ever been consistent either with the views or the opportunities of the narrative poets of the flourishing era. Callimachus, in particular, was conspicuous for the profound knowledge which he possessed of the ancient traditions of Greece; mythology was the exclusive subject of his poetry, and he often treated it with the true fire of a poet. That he was by no means deficient in this, is indeed evident from the writings of the enthusiastic Propertius, who

made him his model in the composition of his Elegies. It was at this period very common to treat of mythological events in a formal manner, collecting all the fictions of a similar class into the same work. Nothing, however, could be more vain, for there is, in truth, no sort of connexion between many of these inventions. They are often various editions of the same fable ; and to arrange them in a consecutive order, could only be accomplished by means of such artificial omissions, and unnatural interlacings, as are to be met with in the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid.

It has every where been the fate of poetry, in its decline, to be more and more taken away from its proper subjects, and applied to matters altogether incapable of poetical illustration. It requires no great acuteness to see, that scientific astronomy is a subject of this kind ; and that a dissertation on some particular department of botany, or a series of medical lectures, although composed in verse, can never form a poem. It is evident that the whole body of this learned poetry which has come down to us from the Alexandrian age, belongs to a false and utterly artificial class of compositions. The moderns should have been the more careful to avoid imitating these productions, that such subjects are even more difficult to be handled in a poetical manner now, than they were in the time of the Greeks. In the first place, the Greeks of a more early period had applied didactic poetry to a great number of subjects entirely scientific in their nature, not with the design of displaying their skill in the treatment of difficult and repulsive materials, but for the real purpose of communicating knowledge—at a time when prose writing was either entirely unknown, or in a state so unpolished as not to be a fit vehicle for general information, or not so easy for the authors themselves as the hexameter verse. Their scientific poetry was therefore unaffected in its origin, and proceeded from the natural audacity of the Grecian intellect—a circumstance which must have been of great use to the artificial poets who treated of scientific subjects at a

later period. The mythology of the Greeks, moreover, embraced the whole visible world within the circle of its bold personifications and delightful fables; so that nothing, in truth, could be imagined, which was not connected in some manner with these beautiful fictions, and thus placed within the proper province of ancient poetry. Even in treating of a botanical or medical subject, innumerable circumstances must have occurred to a Grecian poet, which might give him an opportunity of borrowing poetical illustrations from the world of fables, and of introducing, without any appearance of stiffness or constraint, those episodes which formed, in truth, the principal charm of his composition, but which must always be far-fetched and artificial in the writings of a modern.

There is one species of poetry invented in this period, which is much more agreeable to our taste, because it is not a mere display of art and imitation, but professes to set before us the peculiarities of a particular mode of life: I mean the bucolic and pastoral poetry—the *Idylls* of Theocritus, and other ancient writers of the same class. The country life certainly abounds in circumstances susceptible of poetical embellishment; but, I confess, I can perceive no good reason why it should be considered in an isolated manner, and abstracted from its due situation in that general picture of the world and of human life, which it is the province of poetry to unfold. Let us reflect for a moment on these passages in the heroic poems of antiquity, or in the chivalric romances of the moderns, which afford us glimpses of the simplicity and repose of rural manners: their simplicity appears still more innocent, and their repose still more peaceful, from the situation in which they are placed—in the midst of the guilty tumult of wars, and the fierce passions of heroes. Here every thing appears in its true and natural connexion; and the poetry is as varied as the world and the men which it professes to represent. The cutting off of rural life, and making the description of it a separate department of writing, has led



poets into perpetual tautologies and repetitions, and induced the more ambitious of them to have recourse to the most unnatural exaggerations. It is very singular that this species of writing should have always been cultivated and popular only in ages of great social refinement. The excess of refinement in the life of cities, has been the means of leading us back to nature and the country. Most Idylls, indeed, betray their origin; and it is too often quite evident, that the shepherds and shepherdesses whom they represent, are in fact gentlemen and ladies in disguise. In Theocritus, without doubt, and in many of the other bucolic poets of antiquity, we see some true rustics, and hear the natural language of unsophisticated shepherdesses. But, even in them, there is introduced so much elegance of language, and so much play of wit, that we are, every now and then, led to forget the rural scenes in which we are supposed to be placed, and to feel that we are still in the midst of the social refinements of the courts of Ptolemy or Augustus. In general, the Idylls were what their name expresses—little poetical pictures,—representations in miniature, sometimes of mythological subjects, at other times of matters in common life, but almost always amatory in their purpose and termination. Poetry had now become utterly degraded from her ancient dignity, split into unnatural divisions, and deprived of the strength which she formerly possessed. The exhaustion of her powers became daily more and more manifest, in the diminutiveness of all her productions. She soon gave birth to nothing but little trifling buds and flowerets. Puns, conceits, and quibbles, were the fashion of the day. The age of poetry was gone when that of anthologies commenced.



## LECTURE III.

RETROSPECT—INFLUENCE OF THE GREEKS ON THE ROMANS—SKETCH OF  
ROMAN LITERATURE.

AFTER the Greeks had ceased to be a nation, their literature became daily more and more unconnected with the affairs of active life. This was first and most conspicuously the fate of their philosophy—whose scientific principles were at all times in opposition to the popular faith, and whose lofty conceptions were now no longer in unison with the degraded feelings of that fallen nation. Historical information became, indeed, much more extensive; and historical literature received a more scientific form, and was applied to a greater variety of subjects than of old; but the vigour of ancient conceptions, and the free spirit of ancient enquiry, were for ever gone. The art of rhetoric increased daily in public opinion, and soon came to form almost the only subject of public interest and amusement. If a fantastical and sophistical abuse of this art was not uncommon, even in the older and better times of Greece, it is easy to see to what extent that must now have prevailed when her political independence was entirely lost, and the public taste, even in language, was utterly debased. Even poetry, with which the whole mental cultivation of Greece began, had descended from her original eminence, and become reduced to the rank of an art which men supposed might be acquired by means of rules and practice, like a handicraft. Even poetry could not be exempted from the influence of the degradation which surrounded her. The fate of sculpture was much more fortunate: perhaps because that art has less connexion with the affairs of active life. The artist laboured on, in the seclusion of his

workshop, to embody in marble the lofty conceptions of preceding ages, without regard to the political degradation or moral corruption of the time in which he lived. It is true that the relaxation of manners gave rise to a certain effeminacy and perversion of taste even in sculpture; but this evil was far from being so widely prevalent as the corresponding corruptions in the sister arts. There is no doubt that very many of those works of ancient sculpture and architecture, whose beauty and perfection still appear to us unrivalled, were the production of the same age which saw oratory and poetry reduced altogether to a state of decay and degradation.

In those sciences which are the most unconnected with external life, and have little dependence on the political or private manners of a nation, the inventive genius of the Greeks still displayed itself in all its brilliancy and strength. In the mathematics, although they were destitute of many instruments which have been invented by modern ingenuity, and which now appear altogether indispensable, they made great progress both in geometry and astronomy; and the true system of the universe, which had, it is supposed, been guessed at, in a much earlier age, by the Pythagoreans, was now perfectly known and recognised by at least a great number of their philosophers. The wonder-working science and ingenuity of Archimedes were such, as to strike even the Romans with terror and amazement; and although they had no better system of numeration than the very defective one of letters, and were even ignorant of reckoning by decimals, the Greeks may boast of having produced, in Euclid, a geometrical writer whose works are esteemed of classical authority even by the profoundest mathematicians of modern times. Medicine, which had always been a favourite pursuit among the Greeks, now became one of their principal occupations, and furnished them with free scope for the exercise of all their acuteness, inventiveness, and love of systems. It was not only by means of their literature, and their eminence as

rhetoricians and grammarians, but also, in no inconsiderable degree, by means of their skill as artists, mathematicians, and physicians, that the Greeks acquired their power over Roman intellect; a power which, however much the old Roman prejudices were at first against it, made daily progress after the two nations had been brought fairly into contact; and, in consequence of the capture of Tarentum, and the subjection of Magna Græcia and Sicily to the Roman arms, soon became a matter of indispensable necessity to the whole habits of the victorious people. Twice were the Greek rhetoricians and philosophers banished from Rome by a decree of the senate; and the elder Cato, that undistinguishing enemy of every thing that was Greek, could not even abide that Greek physicians should cure Roman maladies. He depicted these practitioners as impious sorcerers, who contradicted the course of nature, and restored dying men to life by means of unholy charms; and advised his countrymen to remain steadfast, not only by their old Roman principles and manners, but also by the venerable unguents and balsams which had come down to them from the wisdom of their grandmothers. How necessary the Greek rhetoricians, and the teachers of the Greek arts and language had become to the Romans, may be gathered from the speedy appearance of a second decree of banishment, which shows that very little attention had been paid to the injunctions of the first. Nor is it difficult to discover the origin of all this. The Greek language was at that time universally diffused throughout the whole of the civilised world. The poems of Homer were read in the remotest districts of Asia; even the Indians were not, in all probability, entirely ignorant of Grecian literature; while, in the furthest extremity of the west, Carthaginian navigators described their voyages of discovery, and Hannibal himself wrote the history of his wars in the language of the Greeks. After the conquest of southern Italy and Sicily, whose language was almost entirely Greek, and still more after they had by degrees acquired the dominion of Mace-

donia and Achaia, a knowledge of this language must have become every day more and more necessary to the Romans, especially on account of the many historical works which the Greeks possessed, respecting all those nations and countries with which the extended circle of their political operations had now brought that ambitious people into contact. The Greek language was adopted even by the Romans, who attempted, about that period, to write the history of their own nation; and the Greek Polybius, who came to Rome as a hostage in the course of the Achaian wars, was the first who described to this great people the state of the world, and the political relations of its inhabitants, in a work which, at least in a political point of view, must always be considered as classical even by the latest posterity. Livius Andronicus, a Greek taken captive at Tarentum, who was acquainted with the Latin language, first enabled the Romans to hear and read the *Odyssey* in the rude disguise of their native tongue; and afterwards, by means of his translations, introduced them to some acquaintance with the pleasures of theatrical exhibitions and the riches of the Grecian drama. But it is not to be denied that the principal inducement which led first the Romans of high rank, and afterwards the whole of the nation, to admire and imitate the institutions and language of the Greeks, was unquestionably this,—a knowledge of the language and manners of the Greeks was a necessary step to an acquaintance with their rhetoric. Eloquence, even in Rome, exerted over political events an influence always powerful, not unfrequently imperative and conclusive: and, in the more troublesome times which followed the period of Gracchus, the popular passion became every day more violent for all the instruments of this art,—in spite of the remonstrances of some sturdy patriots, who condemned it as a system of sophistry, not only dangerous to the welfare of the state, but utterly inimical to the progress and soundness of the human intellect.

The later literature of the Romans is such as to keep us

perpetually in mind of its origin; and few are now disposed to question the truth of the common assertion—that the Roman writers are in general mere imitators of the Greeks.

It is absolutely necessary that those nations who make their appearance at a later period of the history of the world, as well as of the general development of human intellect, should derive a great part of their mental cultivation as a legacy from the polished nations of the more early times; and this implies, in itself, no reproach. It were preposterous to introduce into literature the petty ideas of a mercantile town, and to insist that the writers of each nation should labour to make their productions as different as possible from those of their neighbours. To make use of the cultivation of another people is far from disgraceful: it is only necessary that we preserve our substantial individuality as a nation; that we do not part with the original peculiarities of our language and mode of thinking; nor sacrifice what is most our own, out of an extravagant admiration for what belongs originally to others. Knowledge is, in itself, the common property of all nations; and the genius of a poet or of a philosopher, who aspires to exert a commanding influence on his fellow-countrymen, is exalted and enriched by a retrospect to the high points of perfection in art, in reflection, in spirit, and in language, to which the men of former ages and other countries have attained.

That imitation alone is lifeless which aims not to extend the field, and increase the power of native genius, but merely to appropriate peculiar species of writing used by a foreign nation—an attempt which can seldom be crowned with entire success—and to reach, by elaborate artifice, beauties, whose very existence depends, in a great measure, on their being altogether natural and unsought.

The literature of Rome has fallen in some measure into both of these errors. Her writers both neglected the ancient and national traditions of their own country, and

bestowed much unprofitable labour on the imitation of foreign modes of writing, which, as soon as they are transplanted from their native soil, for the most part assume the appearance of unproductiveness, coldness, and death; or, at best, protract a lingering and inefficient life, like the sickly exotics of a greenhouse.

There is, nevertheless, a character peculiar to the writers of Rome, by means of which—in spite of the servility with which they have, in general, imitated their models and originals in the literature of Greece—their works have obtained an appearance of dignity and worthiness, that are altogether their own. This, indeed, belongs not so much to themselves as to their nation—to Rome, the great point of union between the ancient and the modern world.

The artist who excels in sculpture or painting, must be altogether animated and inspired with one great and indwelling idea, which occupies his whole soul; an idea for which he forgets all others, and in which alone he lives, and to which all his works are entirely subservient. His masterpieces are mere attempts to body forth, and render visible to others, the greatness of those conceptions which have their residence within the depths of his own mind. In like manner, every true poet, and every great inventive author, must be filled with some idea peculiarly his own, and all-powerful over his soul—which is the central point and focus of his intellect—to which every thing else is subordinate; and of which the writings, wherein he embodies his spirit, are but the ministers, interpreters, and tools. Here it is that the superiority of Greeks over Romans is manifest and triumphant. Think only of the great poets of the glorious time of Greece—of *Æschylus*, *Pindar*, *Sophocles*; or of the patriotic poet of the populace, *Aristophanes*; or of the orator *Demosthenes*—or of the two first of historians, *Herodotus* and *Thucydides*—or those profoundest of thinkers, *Aristotle* and *Plato*. In each of these great authors we shall find a distinct and peculiar spirit of reflection, a peculiar manner of narration, a peculiar form of

composition ; even with regard to style and language, the first time we open the pages of one of these master-spirits, we feel as if we were transplanted into an unknown world. Thus rich and manifold was the genius of the Greeks ; but we should seek in vain for so great a spirit of originality among the Roman writers. Yet there is something in them which atones for this defect ; they also have their high, their great idea—not that the individuals are so favoured—but the possession is common to them all : it is the idea of ROME—of Rome so wonderful in her ancient manners and laws, so great even in her errors and her crimes ; of Rome, so eternally remarkable for the unrivalled dominion with which she ruled the world. It is this spirit which breathes from the lips of every Roman, and which stamps a character of independent dignity and grandeur, even on his most slavish imitations of the writings of the Greeks.

The greatness and the political activity of the state, on the one hand, and the power and audacious exertion of intellect in the individuals of which the state is composed, on the other, are, by the nature of things, in some measure opposed to each other ; although it be unquestionably both a natural and a proper feeling, which makes every good citizen wish equal success to political energy and individual genius, in the country to which he belongs.

As affairs are constituted, this much is certain, that so manifold and various a development of human faculties as that which took place in Greece, can never occur in any state where the principle of patriotism has attained a certain point of predominance—where men have no thoughts and no feelings which are not occupied and penetrated with the greatness and the glory of their country. It was necessary that Athens should have been as free as she really was—sufficiently free to allow a large portion of her citizens to abstract themselves altogether from political concerns, without any danger to their political privileges—before she could have displayed, as she has done, in every de-



partment of intellect and art, the unrivalled energies of the Grecian genius. Sparta was the only state in Greece, constituted as such, at once virtuously and powerfully; the only state whose triumphs were not confined to temporary dominion and success, but extended to a strong, a sound, and an enduring political existence. These advantages were not to be gained without some sacrifice: and Sparta chose to obtain them by adopting a system of municipal institutions, the tendency of which was to confine the whole thoughts and manners of her citizens within a particular range. She was content to be without philosophers and poets, provided she could only have sagacious statesmen and intrepid warriors; and he who, had he been born in Athens, might have become a Sophocles or a Plato, envied, at Lacedæmon, no other names but those of Lycurgus and Leonidas.

But I must illustrate the truth of my position respecting the Roman authors, by a recurrence to individual examples. Is it not clear, that in Cæsar, or even in Cicero, (considering both of these merely as writers,) there is a something which sets them at once far before the rhetoricians, grammarians, philosophers, and sophists, whose pupils they evidently are in all that regards language, eloquence, and mode of thinking, and to whom they are so often and so obviously inferior in the acuteness and the scientific knowledge, which it is one principal object of their writings to display? Every one must feel that here, as in all the works of the great Roman writers, there breathes a spirit very different from that of the corrupted sophistry of the later age of Greece. This is not the genius, or the peculiar spirit of the authors themselves: it is the idea of Rome—the idea of the solitary grandeur of their country, which, although its operations be very different, alike animates them all; and, like the unseen spirit of life, pervades and illuminates the whole body of their writings.

That the Romans learned or borrowed every thing from the Greeks, and had, in reality, nothing which was peculiarly,



and from antiquity, their own, is very far from the truth. We should come nearer the mark if we should say, that, through the overmastering influence of Greek manners and Greek authors, the Romans of a later period were induced to forget what they ought most carefully to have cherished and preserved—the old heroic tales and national poems of their ancestors. These surely were the productions of an age far preceding any knowledge or imitation of Grecian models ; and yet, so much have they been despised, that we can scarcely perceive any trace of their existence, except in certain relics which have been transferred from true poetry to the half-fabulous histories of the infant ages of Rome. In many passages of those Roman writers who were the best acquainted with the ancient usages and manners of their country, allusion is made to the existence of certain old songs, whose purpose was to celebrate the illustrious actions of their early ancestors, and which had commonly been sung at their religious festivals, as well as at the private entertainments of the Roman nobles. There, then, were heroic poems, wherein the patriotic feelings and the poetical genius of the Romans found means to express themselves, long before the Romans became the pupils of the Greeks, and acquired from them, along with that sophistical eloquence of which I have already said so much, a style of poetry more regular and learned, and, in every thing which respects prosody and language, incomparatively more polished than that which they had of old possessed. If it should be asked what were the subjects of these old Roman poems, the Roman histories, I conceive, may easily furnish us with an answer. Not only the fabulous birth and fate of Romulus, and the rape of the Sabine women, but also the most poetical combat of the Horatii and Curiatii—the pride of Tarquin—the misfortune and death of Lucretia, with their bloody revenge, and the establishment of liberty by the elder Brutus—the wonderful war of Porsenna, and the steadfastness of Scævola—the banishment of Coriolanus, the war which he kindled against his country, the subsequent struggle of his

feelings, and the final triumph of his patriotism at the all-powerful intercession of his mother: these, and the like circumstances, if they be examined from the proper point of view, cannot fail to be considered as the relics and fragments of the ancient heroic traditions and heroic poems of the Romans. As such, they are of great value; and that cannot be diminished by any difficulties which the mere historical student may experience, in reconciling the discrepancies of narrative, or explaining the obscurities of allusion, with which, in their present condition, they abound. That many things which, of right, belong to these ancient poems, still exist under the disguise of an historical clothing; that in Livy, above all, the spirit and power of these old songs is often the predominant inspiration of the narrative, has, indeed, very frequently been conjectured. But it was reserved for a learned inquirer of our own time, Niebuhr, to take these compositions to pieces, and to detect, with a felicity which has seldom been equalled, the modern inventions and additions by which incidents, in themselves unconnected, have been artificially conjoined. This critic has, indeed, taken away from the Roman history; but we have gained through his means a more accurate acquaintance with the nature of the ancient Roman traditions which we possess. Before the rhythm and artifices of Greek versification had weaned Roman ears from their affection for the simple sounds of their own songs, these historical or heroic adventures were sung in a loose sort of verses, which the ancient Italians called Saturnalian; and which, excepting that they had no rhyme, bore a strong resemblance to those lawless *Alexandrines*, as they were called, of which almost all the nations of Europe made use, during the period of the middle ages.

These heroic ballads of the more early Romans—if we may judge of their general import from the materials which they have furnished to the Roman historians—seem to have aimed at the narration of no incident which did not belong to their country, and at the expression of no feelings but

such as were purely patriotic. We perceive in them, indeed, no inconsiderable admixture of love for the marvellous ; but even that propensity seems to have been exclusively national in its character and spirit ; for the Roman fablers appear to have indulged themselves in the creation of no wonders which might not redound in some measure, to the honour of their ancestors. It is much to be regretted, that the manifold witchery of the *Odyssey*, and the perfect harmony of the ever various hexameter, should have made so entire a conquest of the ears and souls of the Romans, as to leave no room for a more affectionate preservation of these ancient poems of their country.

There is, however, another reason which tended, in no inconsiderable degree, to render the Romans indifferent, if not averse, to their heroic legends ; and which must have mainly contributed towards bringing these into a state of neglect, the consequences of which have been, that, with the exception of those fragments which have been imperfectly preserved in the shape of a half-fabulous and ill-connected chronicle, they have been utterly lost, not only to the history of Rome, but to that of the world itself, of which Rome became afterwards the mistress. The last heroic personage of the old Roman history is Camillus, who delivered Rome of her invaders, the Gauls. He falls within the period both from tradition and of poetry ; and there can be no doubt that his fame was transmitted, in songs, to the posterity of those whom he had set free. With the expulsion of the Gauls, the historical period of Rome begins. During the time when they ravaged the country, the ancient monuments must in a great measure have perished ; for every thing previous to this epoch is dark and doubtful, even that which is founded on fact is perpetually intermingled with a texture of fabulous inventions. From this time, moreover, the true period of Roman greatness commences. In a historical point of view, it is even the proper period of Roman heroism ; and to it we may probably refer the composition of those old heroic songs,

of which Cato and Cicero make mention, and which Ennius and even Livy had perpetually before their eyes.

Now, the older traditions concerning the kings and heroes of the infant city, the establishment of its republican government, and the vicissitudes of its early fate, were near enough to this age of Roman valour and virtue, to be still felt with all that power and pressure which are necessary to make such events the fit subjects of national poetry. But at a period somewhat later, the case was widely different. After the subjection of Tarentum, Italy, Sicily, Macedonia, Carthage, Spain, and Achaia, there could have been comparatively little sympathy between the petty Rome of antiquity—of her that made war against the Sabines, or beleaguered the town of Veii for as many years as Agamemnon did Troy—and mighty Rome pressing on to the dominion of the world, with an irresistible rapidity and an unwavering confidence in the ascendancy of her victorious star. The Greeks were, even from the remotest times, a numerous nation, divided into many tribes, and having possession of extensive territories. But the original patrimony of the Romans consisted of a single village; and they had formed themselves, first, into an independent, and afterwards into a conquering people, entirely by the incorporation of foreigners who took little interest in the traditions of their earliest achievements.

It was, therefore, an inevitable consequence of the nature of the things themselves, and of the progress of events, that these ancient patriotic traditions and poems should gradually sink into neglect—at least that they should never form the groundwork of a polished and developed literature; and, in short, that the Romans should adopt in their stead the thoughts, the recollections, and the poetry of the Greeks. The blame of this should by no means be exclusively attached to Ennius; although it be true that the acute historical critic, whom I have cited above, has accused that writer of maliciously calumniating and depressing these

ancient compositions, in order that he himself might be considered as the author and founder of Roman poetry. It is, however, certain that Ennius boasted, with much openness, that he was animated with three different souls—in allusion to his knowledge of three languages—Greek, Latin, and Oscan, or ancient Italian. And there is no improbability in the supposition that a man who did so, was not a little proud of his success (imperfect as that really was) in transferring the music of the Greek hexameter into another tongue. The greatest of poets are not always exempt from this sort of vanity, and often attach a very undue weight to some merely external circumstances in their composition. They judge too much of the value of what they have done, by the labour which it has cost them to do it; and think little, on the other hand, of those qualities which form their real excellence—nay, are sometimes almost unconscious of the existence of that internal inspiration which animates their genius, and awakens our sympathy. Ennius, for instance, appears to have thought more about his versification than his poetry; and to have too much despised the old poets of his native country, merely because they had not, like himself, made use of the rich and various measures of the Greeks. Yet there is no doubt that Ennius was a true poet. In many of his verses which have been preserved by succeeding writers, there breathes the noble spirit of genuine emotion. But even if every fragment of his writings had perished, the admiration with which he was regarded by Lucretius would have been sufficient to place him high in our esteem. That illustrious poet, it is well known, considered Ennius as his master and his model. His genius was of a kindred order; and he bore to him a strong resemblance, both in the turn of his thoughts and the flow of his diction.

From this time the imitation of the Greek writers proceeded rapidly, although not with uniform success. Of all the compositions of the Greeks, their histories and their orations were most interesting to the Romans, and most

akin to their political habits. They were, consequently, most fortunate in their imitations of these modes of writing. The Greek philosophy, on the other hand, was always foreign to them; and the success of their imitations of Greek poetry was very different in the different departments of the art.

In the drama the Romans were perpetually making attempts, from the time of Ennius downward. In truth, however, they have left nothing in that department of poetry except translations from the Greek, more or less exact, but never executed with sufficient spirit to entitle them even to the less servile name of *imitations*. The lost tragedians, Pacuvius and Attius, were mere translators; and the same thing may be said of the two comic poets, Plautus and Terence, whose writings are in our hands. That old domestic species of bantering comedy, which was known by the Oscian name of *fabula attellana*, was not, however, entirely laid aside: it still preserved its place as an amusement of society in the merry meetings of the nobles; who, in the midst of all their foreign refinements, were willing, now and then, to revive in this way their recollections of the national sports and diversions of their Italian ancestry. With the exception of this low species of buffoon writing, the Romans never possessed any thing which deserved to be called a dramatic literature of their own. With regard to their translations from the Greek tragedians, one principal cause of their stiffness and general want of success was this—that the mythology, which forms the essence of these compositions, was in fact foreign to the Roman people. It is very true that the general outline of the Roman mythology was originally copied from that of the Greeks, but the individual parts of the two fabrics were altogether different and local. Iphigenia and Orestes were always more or less foreigners to a Roman audience; and the whole drama, in which these and similar personages figured, never attained in Rome any more healthy state of existence than that of an exotic in a greenhouse, which is only preserved from

death by the daily application of artificial heat and unsatisfying labour. The names of the individual tragedies, which were supposed to be the best of their kind in the time of Augustus, may suffice to show us how narrow was the circle in which the Roman dramatists moved, and how soon their tragic art has reached the termination of its progress. The same thing may easily be gathered from a consideration of those orations in dramatic form which are commonly ascribed to Seneca. In like manner, the representation of the foreign manners of Athens, which perpetually occupied the Roman comedy, must have appeared to Roman spectators at once cold and uninteresting. It is no difficult matter to perceive the reasons why the witchery of pantomime and dance soon supplanted at Rome every other species of dramatic spectacle.

There is one of a still more serious nature upon which I have not yet touched. The Roman people had by degrees become accustomed to take a barbarous delight in the most wanton displays of human violence and brutal cruelty. Hundreds of lions and elephants fought and bled before their eyes; even Roman ladies could look on, and see crowds of hireling gladiators wasting energy, valour, and life on the guilty arena of a circus. It is but too evident that they who could take pleasure in spectacles such as these, must very soon have lost all that tenderness of inward feeling, and all that sympathy for inward suffering, without which none can perceive the force and beauty of a tragic drama. Still, however, it may unquestionably appear a strange thing, that, since the Romans did make many attempts at the composition of tragedies, they should never have chosen their subjects from the ancient history or traditions of their country; more particularly when we consider that the tragedians of modern times have borrowed from these very sources many subjects of a highly poetical nature, and, at the same time, far from being unsusceptible of dramatic representation,—such as the combat of the Horatii, the firmness of Brutus, the internal conflict and changed



spirit of Coriolanus,—restoring in this way to poetry what was originally among the most rightful of her possessions. To find a satisfactory solution of this difficulty, we must examine into the nature of these neglected themes. The patriotic feelings embodied in these traditions were too much akin to the feelings of every Roman audience, to admit of being brought forward upon a stage. The story of Coriolanus may serve as an example. How could a Roman poet have dared to represent this haughty patrician in the full strength of his disdain and scorn of plebeians, at the time when the Gracchi were straining every nerve to set the plebeians free from the authority of the nobles? What effect must it have had to introduce the banished Coriolanus upon a Roman stage, reproaching, in his merited indignation, with bitter words and dear-bought mockery, the jealous levity of his countrymen, at a time when the noblest and the most free-spirited of the last Romans, Sertorius, from his place of exile among the unsubdued tribes of Spain and Lusitania, meditated more complete revenge against similar ingratitude, and was laying plans for the destruction of the old, and the foundation of a second Rome? Or how could a Roman audience have endured to see Coriolanus represented as approaching Rome at the head of a hostile and victorious army, at the time when Sylla was in reality at open war with his country; or even at a somewhat later period, when the principal events of his history must have still been familiar and present to the recollection of his countrymen? Not in these instances alone, but in the whole body of the early traditions and history of Rome, the conflict between patricians and plebeians occupied so pre-eminent a place, as to render Roman subjects incapable of theatrical representation during the times of the republic. Much more does this apply to the age of Augustus and his successors, when, indeed, Brutus and the ancient consular heroes could not have failed to be the most unwelcome of all personages. We may find sufficient illustrations of these remarks in the history of the modern drama. For, although



Shakespeare has not hesitated to represent the civil wars of York and Lancaster on the English stage, we must observe, that before he did so, these wars had entirely terminated; and the recurrence of similar events could not easily have been foreseen by one living in the pacific times of James. With regard to our German drama, it is true that our tragic poets have chosen many of their most interesting subjects from our civil tumults—particularly from the thirty years' war; but even here the case is very different from what it would have been among the Romans. The Germans are, indeed, countrymen, but they are not all subjects of the same state. And yet with us, the poets who handle such topics at much length, have a very difficult task to perform; they have need of much delicacy to avoid wounding, or perhaps reviving the feelings of parties, and thus destroying the proper impression which their poetry should make.

Such are the reasons why the Romans had no national tragedies, and why, in general, they had no such thing as a theatre of their own.

Among their poets who applied themselves to other departments of the art, Lucretius stands by himself in Roman literature, whether we consider the subjects or the spirit of his writings. Perhaps, indeed, he may give us something like an idea of the style and manner of the more ancient Roman poets. By the later Romans he was little thought of: they neither felt his beauties, nor appreciated his genius. His work *concerning the nature of things*, belongs to that species of writing which arose among the Greeks out of particular circumstances in their history, and which, among them only, was a national mode of composition—the didactic poetry of science. The philosophy which he has chosen to illustrate, was the worst which he could have selected, either as a Roman or as a poet. The system of Epicurus, I mean—which annihilates all belief and all lofty feeling; which, in a scientific point of view, is connected with the most absurd of hypotheses; which, in its influence on life, if not immoral, is at least selfish and unpatriotic; and which,

above all, is the deadly enemy of every thing like fancy and poetry. It is true that Lucretius has mastered all these difficulties ; but who can see, without regret, a spirit so noble, as that which is every where apparent in his writings, devoted and enslaved to a destructive system of Grecian sophistry ? In inspiration, and in sublimity, he is the first of Roman poets ; as a painter and worshipper of nature, he is the first of all the poets of antiquity whose writings have come down to us. With regard to the species of writing which he adopted, and in general with regard to the place which nature should occupy in poetical compositions, I shall now make a few general remarks.

And in the first place, I think it will be admitted on all hands, that poetry may choose the subject of her descriptions as well as the source of her inspiration, not only in human beings themselves, but with equal propriety in the external nature with which they are surrounded. In the poetry of nature, as in the poetry of man, there is room for a three-fold distinction. The poetry of man may be, first, a clear mirror of actual life and the present ; or, secondly, an embodying of the recollections of a marvellous antiquity, and departed age of heroic actions and adventures ; or, thirdly, if it be in the hands of a poet who desires rather to inspire than to describe, it may consist in a stirring up and awakening of the hidden depths of human feeling. All this might be equally well said of the poetry of nature. For this poetry may, in the first place, give us a picture of the external appearances of things ; and for this purpose introduce all that is quickening and enlivening in spring ; all that is generous or powerful in animals ; all that is beautiful and lovely in flowers and trees ; all, in short, that seems to the eyes of men sublime or pleasing, whether in the heavens under which they move, or on the earth upon which they tread. The only difficulty here is to avoid exuberance ; for descriptions which are too full, even although they should be perfectly just, are distressing to us, and destroy their own effect ; while solitary flowers from

the fulness of nature, inserted at due intervals into the web of poetry, lend a charm to the whole texture which no other ornament can rival. But nature also, in the second place, had her wonderful past; she also has had her times of gigantic dimension and unfettered energy, which correspond with the heroic ages in the history of man. To be convinced of this, we need only attempt to analyse the feelings with which we ourselves survey nature in her wildest forms; the awe with which we are struck when we enter into some savage wilderness, where rocks and hills, and woods and waters, are all mingled together in the shapeless majesty of chaos. Or we may reflect for a moment on the tenor of all ancient traditions—they abound in the display of the great physical catastrophes of the past. All the more unusual and terrific appearances of nature—storms, tempests, floods, and earthquakes—seem to be scattered remnants of this ancient state of things, and carry us back for a moment into the bosom of this mysterious past. These are among the most proper and the most dignified subjects of poetry, and of them, accordingly, the great painter of nature, Lucretius, has made frequent use. But here, also, the poet must be contented with the general representation of a state of things more wild and free—a past age of greater and more terrific operations. He must be contented with the possession of a theatre on which nature may perform her most awful tragedies; but he must not scrutinise with too close an eye the mysteries of her working. It is no part of his province to explain the scientific causes of these great phenomena. If he should begin to teach us *how* the mountains were framed—it makes no difference whether he adopts the theory of fire or water—he has overstepped his limits; he has entered upon a topic as remote from his art as that system of atoms which even the unrivalled imagination of Lucretius could not represent in a manner thoroughly poetical. But there is yet a third mode in which the poet may make use of nature. Between the poet and nature, no less than between the poet and

man, there is the sympathy of feeling. Not only in the song of the nightingale, or in those melodies to which all men listen, but even in the roar of the stream, and the rushing of the forest, the poet thinks that he hears a kindred voice of sorrow or of gladness : as if spirits and feelings like our own were calling to us from afar, or seeking to sympathise and communicate with us from the utmost nearness to which their nature will allow them to approach us. It is for the purpose of listening to these tones, and of holding mysterious converse with the soul of nature, that every great poet is a lover of solitude. The question of the philosophic enquirer, whether nature be, in truth, so animated, or whether all this be not mere self-deception, is one of no avail. It is sufficient that this feeling and this aspiration are things which exist, more or less, in the fancy and the breast, not of poets only, but of all men. In the writings of the Greeks and Romans, we have only a few traces of this sort of poetry: they are more abundant in those of our northern ancestry, because these lived less in cities, and were, of course, more intimate with the simple forms of nature. But the truth is, that all these descriptions and feelings of nature should never, in poetry, be cut off and separated from the representation of those human beings, of whose real life they form the most beautiful ornaments. When they are insulated and set forth by themselves, the great and perfect picture of the world, which it is the business of poetry to place before our eyes, becomes contracted in its limits : the harmony is irremediably destroyed, and that power, which is so irresistible when all is together, becomes broken, dissipated, and ineffectual. The scientific poetry of nature which is to be found in Lucretius is, in fact, as defective, as a mode of writing, as the doctrines which he defends are destructive as a system of philosophy; and this is not the less true, because Lucretius himself is entitled, as a man, to much respect—as a poet, to our most enthusiastic admiration.

The great writers of Rome may be best classed and arranged according to the periods in which they were pro-

duced. The last ages of the republic were somewhat less perfect in point of language, but perhaps in every other respect richer, than the age of Augustus. Cicero, considered as an orator, possesses great variety of materials, and is sufficiently skilful in his application of them to the purposes of his art: perhaps the greatness of the events of which they treat, and the high place which Cicero himself holds in the history of the world, have conferred on these orations a character of still higher importance than that which they intrinsically deserve. It seems, at least, by no means easy to be explained, why compositions so often overflowing with verbosity, should have come to be considered as standards of good writing. Even his contemporaries used to reproach him with imitating the swell and pomp of Asiatic eloquence. But, in truth, the influence which Cicero exerted on the literature and general character of the Roman people, proceeded principally from his having been the introducer of the more elevated moral philosophy of the Greeks. For those more abstruse speculations, among the labyrinths of which the spirit of the Greeks was so delighted to find a fit exercise for its subtleness and ingenuity, neither Cicero nor any other Roman writer possessed either feeling or talent. But as a friend and lover of philosophy, Cicero must ever be conspicuous. He found in it consolation in private adversity, comfort in political misfortunes, occupation in retirement, and amusement in exile. The philosophy of Plato was his principal favourite; he considered him as the most happy specimen of an universally beautiful and cultivated intellect, and agreed with all antiquity in esteeming his works the models of perfection, both in reasoning and in language. But Plato, however skilfully he had elaborated the individual parts of his philosophy, had never reduced its whole doctrines to any regular system; in consequence of which circumstance, the later disciples of the Platonic school, through the medium of whom the whole of the Platonic doctrines became known to the Romans, had returned, in a

great measure, to the prejudices of scepticism. This was attended with the worst consequences in the department of Ethics, and accordingly Cicero very often, in regard to that subject, made use of the doctrines of Zeno; or where he found the austerity of these too repulsive, had recourse to those of Aristotle, who, as he professed in every thing to prefer the medium, so in morals he formed himself the medium between the severity of the Stoics and the laxity of the Epicureans. To this last school Cicero was uniformly hostile, and certainly not without reason. It would, indeed, be too much to believe that all those ancient philosophers who, like Epicurus, considered pleasure as the last and highest end of human existence, really extracted from this opinion, and exemplified in their practice, all the evil which we can trace to the adoption of similar principles. But even allowing that by this pleasure, which they considered as the chief good of man, they understood not positive sensual gratification, as was the case with Aristippus, but only a painless state of intellectual enjoyment—which the best of the Epicureans, like the other philosophers of Greece, conceived was only to be found in the exercise of intellectual energies, and the society of congenial friends;—even allowing this, and laying out of the question all that grossness of abuse which has been heaped on Epicurus and his disciples, these philosophers were all in so far wrong, that they taught mankind to seek for their best happiness any where else than in a vigorous discharge of their active duties as men and as citizens. These doctrines tended, at least, to make men regard themselves too exclusively as beings independent of political events; and the adoption of them at Rome was probably extremely hurtful to the Roman constitution. Cicero, in his enmity to Epicurus and his doctrines, was guided by the feelings of a wise and reflecting patriotism. And on this account it is that his philosophical writings have been the favourite study of many active statesmen who had not leisure to follow out long trains of

profound reasoning, but were willing to diversify their moments of leisure by the perusal of works abounding in sane and rational views of human actions and principles.

In the form, as well as in the style of his composition, Cicero is extremely unequal; but this is a fault with which almost all the Roman writers are more or less chargeable, and is, indeed, a natural consequence of the difficulty which they must have experienced in reducing that which they had borrowed or learned from the Greeks to an entire harmony with the thoughts, feelings, and expressions which were original in themselves.

We have the first specimen of a perfect equality of expression in Cæsar. In his writings he displays the same character which distinguished him in action: all is directed to one end, and every thing is better adapted to the attainment of that end than any thing which could have been substituted in its room. He possesses, in the utmost perfection, two qualities which, next to liveliness, are the most necessary in historical compositions—clearness and simplicity. And yet how widely different are the distinctness and brevity of Cæsar, from that open-hearted guilelessness, and almost Homer-like loquacity and clearness, which we admire in Herodotus. As a general arranges his troops where they can act the most efficiently and the most securely, and is careful to make use of every advantage against his enemy, even so does Cæsar arrange every word and expression with a view to its ultimate effect—and even so steadfastly does he pursue his object, without being ever tempted to turn to the right hand or to the left. Among these ancient generals who, like him, have described their own achievements, Xenophon, with all the perfection of his Attic taste, occupies, as a commander, too insignificant a place to be for a moment put in comparison with Cæsar. Several of Alexander's generals, and Hannibal himself, wrote accounts of the remarkable campaigns in which they had been engaged, but unfortunately, their compositions have entirely perished. The Roman, even as a writer, when



we compare him with those who, in similar situations, have made similar attempts, is still Cæsar—the unrivalled and the unconquered.

In the drawing of characters, and indeed, in general, as a historical painter, Sallust has few equals; but he is neither so clear nor so consistent a writer, nor endued with so delicate a sense of propriety, as Cæsar. Here and there we perpetually meet with something forced in his style, and detect the elaborate artifice of a practised writer. Even in history—a form of writing which was more easily than any other transplanted to Rome from the Greek republics, where it had its origin—the close imitation of any individual model never failed to produce disagreeable consequences; and of this we have a striking example in Sallust, whose strict imitation of Thucydides has gone far to lessen the effect of his own great original genius.

In this first flourishing age of Roman authors, it is easy to perceive of what advantage it is to the literature of any nation, that men of the most elevated rank should take a part in it, and co-operate with their inferiors in the forwarding of its development. Their influence insensibly extends itself to every department of literature; and their countrymen learn to treat of every thing, and to judge of every thing, as if they were all animated with the dignified spirit of nobility. It is to this circumstance that the Roman literature is indebted for a great part of its characteristic *greatness* of thought and expression. As after the death of Brutus, a new order of things commenced in the political world, the world of letters experienced a corresponding revolution. The literature of the age of Augustus is distinguished by a tone of spirit entirely its own. The free voice of eloquence was stopped; and the consequence was, that men returned again with redoubled affection to poetry, which had been mute, in a great measure, during the tempestuous periods of the civil wars. Nothing, it was now supposed, could so well celebrate and adorn the restoration of peace, and the happy reign of Octavius, as the ap-



pearance of great national poets, who might supply the chief defect in the literature of their country, and create a body of classical works, in which the ancient Roman traditions might be handed down to posterity. With a view to this, not Virgil alone, but also Propertius and Horace, were flattered, courted, and enriched—in a manner to which the literary men of all other ages and countries have been strangers—by the liberal courtiers of Augustus. Propertius, by the richness of his style, seems to have been well qualified for epic poetry; but he would not sacrifice for fame the freedom of his own inclinations: he lived only for himself, and those feelings of friendship and unfortunate love which filled all his soul, and which animated all his writings with a tenderness unequalled in any other author of his country. Horace, perhaps, exceeds all the Roman writers who have come down to us, in true feeling for heroic greatness. He was a patriot who locked up within his own breast his sorrow for the subversion of the commonwealth; and who had recourse to all manner of pleasures, perhaps even to poetry itself, with a view to dissipate the grief with which he was oppressed. On every occasion we can see the inspiring flame of patriotism and freedom breaking through the mist of levity in which his poetry is involved. He could not, indeed, have framed any great poem out of the early history or traditions of his country, without perpetually betraying feelings which were no longer in season, and could not have been listened to without a crime. He constrained his inclinations, and endeavoured to write like a royalist; but, in spite of himself, he is still manifestly a republican and a Roman.

The calm, industrious, and feeling Virgil was, by his love for nature and for a country life, peculiarly qualified to be the national poet of the Romans. The old Roman, or in general, indeed, the old Italian mode of life, was entirely agricultural and rural; while the Greeks, on the other hand, were chiefly, and that from their earliest days, a trafficking, seafaring, and commercial people. Even the most illustrious and noble of the citizens of Rome lived, in the best

days of the republic, entirely according to the old customs of their countrymen ; and even in the later periods, notwithstanding the great corruption of the metropolis itself, that soundness and strength of moral feeling, and that purity of manners, which belong to an agricultural and rural nation, were far from being entirely banished out of the surrounding districts of Italy. To dwell on rural enjoyments, and make use of simple feelings, therefore, was quite necessary for one who aspired to be the poet, not of the metropolis, but of the nation. Virgil's love for nature and a country life is evident, indeed, in the first work of his youth, the *Eclogues* ; but he has displayed it with the richest eloquence in the most perfect of all his works—the *Georgics*. If he had only paid due honour to this species of poetry, in itself so masterly—so well adapted for Rome, (restored as she was to peace after a succession of wars and revolutions,) and, in truth, so kindred to the general feelings and propensities of all Italians, and refrained from embodying it in the foreign and artificial form of the Alexandrian didactic ; if he had only given to agriculture and rural feelings as prominent a place in his great work, as they really occupied in the ancient ages of his country, and so presented us with one comprehensive and perfect picture of the old Italian life,—the heroic traditions, which it was his chief purpose to revive, would have then obtained a faster hold on our feelings, and a closer connexion with the thoughts of all men and all ages ; and, in short, would have been presented to us with a concentrated spirit and a life, which the plan he has adopted was the most infallible way to dissipate or extinguish. The whole scope of his heroic poem would then have been enlarged, and the connexion of its parts would have become infinitely less artificial. In the very stiff arrangement which he has adopted, the latter part of his poem, which is exclusively dedicated to Italian subjects, appears to infinite disadvantage when compared with the first, in which he has so happily connected the origin of the Romans with the heroic tales of the Trojan period, and made such liberal use of

all the rich inventions of the old poets of the Greeks. Notwithstanding all these defects, however, the *Æneid*, although Virgil himself despised and even wished to destroy it, has always kept its place as the peculiar national poem of the Romans. Were we to judge merely by the high flow of inspiration, and the unlaboured felicity of inborn talent, we might perhaps consider Lucretius, or even Ovid, as a greater poetical genius than Virgil: what secures to him the preference, is that national feeling which forms not the occasional charm, but the perpetual inspiration of his poetry. Still, the *Æneid* can never be looked upon as a perfect poem. The same struggle between borrowed art and native strength, which may be remarked in almost all Roman poets, is evident in Virgil; and in him, not less than in the others, a consequent want of harmony in materials, and even in language, may not unfrequently be observed.

But if Virgil be not exempt from this fault, it is undoubtedly far more apparent in Horace and the other lyrical poets. The epic poetry of different nations has always many points of coincidence; although it is evident enough that the rigid imitation of Homer has weakened and confined the genius of Virgil, and drawn both him and many more recent poets into the most glaring errors. But, laying the form of composition altogether out of the question, the heroic legends of one people can in general be pretty easily ingrafted on those of another. In the early traditions of nations the most remote from each other, we find invariably a thousand circumstances wherein the resemblance is too striking to escape the most superficial observer. I shall not, on the present occasion, pretend to decide whether this resemblance be merely the result of a necessary similarity in the situation of all nations in the infant periods of society; or whether it be not so remarkable in many circumstances, particularly in the marvellous fictions and not very obvious symbols which have so generally been adopted, as to warrant the conclusion, that the coincidence could only have proceeded from the common origin of nations apparently the most uncon-

nected. In serious dramatic poetry, the knowledge of what degrees of perfection have been attained by other nations, is of great use; for it supplies us with specimens of what may be attained, and with a standard by which we may judge of the success of our own attempts. Still, however, the mere form of a foreign drama should never be imitated: the stage which aspires to exert an universal influence, must assume a character conformable to the manners, education, temper, and modes of thinking which prevail among the nation who are to survey its exhibitions. The drama is always powerful exactly in proportion as it is peculiar.

But in no species of composition is imitation so hurtful and despicable as in lyrical poetry. The whole charm and excellence of this sort of writing consists in its being the free emanation of individual feelings. The whole beauty of it vanishes the moment we detect a single trace of imitation; it is only tolerable because it is natural; and the appearance of art renders it immediately disgusting. But in the writings of Roman lyrical poets, there is nothing more common than to be able to point out, with the utmost precision, the line where imitation of some Greek original ends, and the poet begins to speak from his own feelings. It is perhaps the best proof of the power of Horace's genius, that in spite of this defect, which is as common in his writings as in any others, he is still of all Roman poets the one who commands the greatest share of our sympathy, and stirs up our enthusiasm with the most potent magic. His greatness is ever most conspicuous where he speaks altogether as a Roman,—when he dwells upon the sublime magnanimity of antiquity, on the solitary grandeur of the exiled Regulus, or on those other heroes who, in his own phrase, “were prodigal of their great souls” in the service of their country.

In satire, the only species of writing which can be said to have been an invention of the Romans, Horace is equally illustrious. This sort of writing, which belongs, indeed, to the common class of ludicrous lyrical poetry, but which received at Rome the rank and characteristics of a separate

species of composition, and gave rise to a new and less stately form of the heroic measure, is exclusively Roman, not in these respects only, but also in the spirit with which it is animated, and the whole subjects of which it treats. It is entirely confined to the capital itself—the social habits and customs, amusements, spectacles, and assemblies of its inhabitants; but perhaps its most favourite topic is the corruption of Roman manners, which were now daily approaching to the last stage of possible viciousness; this great city having become not only the seat of universal government and wealth, but also the centre-point of attraction to the whole family of adventurers—the magnet which was perpetually drawing within its circle the collected filth and worthlessness of the whole world. The only perfect picture which poetry can set before us of common life is in the drama: individual traits or scenes, however masterly, can never satisfy us. The Roman satire, therefore, in the hands of such a writer as Horace, is merely a substitute for that comedy which the Roman people ought to have possessed. With regard to the satires of Juvenal, their chief interest depends on the vehement expression of scorn and indignation excited by the contemplation of the execrable vices: the spirit in which they are conceived may be morally sublime, but can scarcely receive the name of poetical.

In their prose writings the Romans attained much higher eminence than in their poetry. Livy may be said to be perfect so far as language is concerned; for in him we have a faultless specimen of that rhetorical species of history which was peculiar to the ancients.

The first half of the long reign of Augustus commonly receives the credit of having produced a number of great geniuses, whose talents, it is very true, were first perfectly developed during that period, but who had, in fact, been, almost all of them, born in the last years of the republic; who had seen with their own eyes the greatness of their country, and been animated in their youth with the breath of freedom. The younger generation who were born, or

who, at the least, grew up to manhood, after the commencement of the monarchy, were altogether different. In the last years of Augustus, we can already perceive the symptoms of declining taste ; in Ovid particularly, who is overrun with an unhealthy superfluity of fancy, and a sentimental effeminaey of expression.

How soon even history, in which the Romans were most successful, yielded to the depressing influence of the following Cæsars, and became corrupted even as an art, may be easily seen in the timid style of Velleius, to say nothing of the flattering meanness with which that writer often disguises the true import of the incidents which he narrates. The proper head and founder of a new and most artificial taste in writing, which soon afterwards became predominant, was Seneca the philosopher. The more despotic the government became, the more were those, whose spirits were still unsatisfied, inclined to throw themselves into the arms of Stoicism ; the principles of that philosophy were agreeable to the pride and freedom of strong minds, exactly in proportion as every thing noble and free was banished from the principles and practice of the tyrants under whom they lived. An unnatural pomp, and extravagance even, of expression, has been, in more instances than this, produced by the political and social depression of a nation. But Lucan furnishes, perhaps, the most striking example of this seemingly strange consequence of despotism : in him we find the most outrageously republican feelings making their chosen abode in the breast of a wealthy and luxurious courtier of Nero. It excites surprise, and even disgust, to observe how he stoops to flatter that detestable tyrant, in expressions the meanness of which amounts to a crime ; and then, in the next page, exalts Cato above the gods themselves, and speaks of all the enemies of the first Cæsar with an admiration that approaches to idolatry. The Roman poetry, as if unwilling altogether to deny its most ancient though nearly-forgotten destination, came back, in the hands of Lucan, to the cele-

bration of the heroes of Roman history. There can be no doubt that a great historical event may in itself be very well fitted to form the subject of an heroic poem; how near or how distant this event may be in a chronological point of view is, I think, a matter of little consequence: the nature, not the date of the incidents, should be principally considered. The historical event which is to form the subject of an epic poem, should be one wherein feeling and audacity seem to have exerted a more predominant influence than reasoning and calculation,—one, in short, which affords room for the play of fancy. The life and achievements of Alexander the Great, for instance, the fall of Darius, and the expedition to India, might, I have no doubt, furnish an excellent epic subject in the hands of a poet capable of doing justice to such a theme. The civil war between Cæsar and Pompey, on the other hand,—a contest, strictly speaking, not of men or heroes, but of parties and political systems, has formed the groundwork of several excellent tragedies in modern times; but I am at a loss to conceive the possibility of its ever being formed into a fit subject of epic poetry by the art or the genius of any writer. The picture of the taste of this period is completed by the obscure Persius, and the forced style of the elder Pliny. This last author may furnish us with some idea of the extent to which the Romans might have enlarged the field of human knowledge, had they made use of the facilities which were placed within their reach by the political position of their country, and made it their business to collect together the natural curiosities of the different regions to which their influence extended.

Better times, however, succeeded to these: the civilised world was destined to be governed for a season by a genuine Roman of the ancient school sitting on the throne of Augustus. As Trajan was the last of the Cæsars who thought like a Roman, and rivalled the old Roman greatness both in his principles and his achievements, so, very shortly before his reign, the kindred genius of Tacitus con-



cluded the series of great authors whom Rome was destined to produce. This writer had received his education during the reigns of Vespasian and Titus,—times which appeared happy, because they had been preceded by the atrocities of Nero; he had learned to meditate and to be silent under Domitian, and under Nerva he saw the beginning of that more fortunate period which was to appear in the fulness of its glory under the blessed reign of Trajan.

The profound thoughtfulness of his spirit, and the corresponding, though, perhaps, yet more peculiar depth of his expressions, appear always the more inimitable the more attempts are made at their imitation. Even in style, he may be said to be perfect, although the language of his day neither was, nor could be, any longer the same with that of the time of the great Cæsar or of Livy. In these three authors, according to my apprehension, the language of Rome is displayed in its utmost purity and perfection: in Cæsar it appears in unadorned simplicity and greatness; in Livy it wears all the splendour and ornament of elaborate rhetoric, but is still free from exaggeration, beautiful and noble in its construction; in Tacitus, although he is very far from either the chaste simplicity of the one, or the polished elegance of the other of these writers, it assumes an appearance of depth, power, and energy, to which it had as yet been a stranger. It would seem as if the memory had been even more powerful than the presence of Roman greatness, and stamped a character of loftiness on the historian of despotic cruelty, to which none of those who celebrate liberty and victory could attain.



## LECTURE IV.

SHORT DURATION OF THE ROMAN LITERATURE—NEW EPOCH UNDER HADRIAN—  
INFLUENCE OF THE OPINIONS OF THE ORIENTALS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF  
THE WEST—MOSAIC WRITINGS, POETRY OF THE HEBREWS—RELIGION OF  
THE PERSIANS—MONUMENTS OF THE INDIANS—MODES OF INTERMENT AMONG  
THE ANCIENT NATIONS.

I HAVE already said, that literature and philosophy were, at the best, plants foreign to the soil of Rome, and now I imagine all will be inclined to join in my opinion who compare either the number of great Roman writers with that of great Greek writers, or the period during which art and literature flourished in Rome, with the time during which Greece was so eminently distinguished for her attainments in both.

Rome possessed many translators from the Greek, as well as some poets and original writers of her own, from the time when the Scipios began to patronise Greek literature and rhetoric; when Cato began to inquire into the history, antiquities, and language of the Roman people with a view to counteract the influence of the Greek taste introduced by the Scipios; and when Ennius, in part, at least, began to apply the art and poetical measures of the Greeks to Roman subjects, and to lay the foundation of a Roman school of poetry. But to complete the idea of a flourishing literature, we require something more than a few individual inquiries and works, and these, too, as in the present case, sometimes not a little at variance with each other; we look for a certain connexion and unity among all the parts of literature, a determinate and regular fixing of language, particularly of prose; in short, we expect to see the effects of general education, and a wide-spread cultivation of all those branches of knowledge which regard either language

or rhetoric, or even the higher departments of philosophy. The literature of Rome can scarcely be said to have existed till the time of Cicero, who had a greater share in its formation than any other individual, and may, indeed, almost be said to have created the peculiar character by which it was at all times distinguished. Before his time, the whole education of his country, whether with a view to eloquence, or in general to polite letters, was conducted on Greek principles, after Greek models, and in the Greek language. He first demonstrated the possibility of carrying on an extensive and scientific education in the Roman language, by framing and fashioning its constructions so as to embrace, in the happiest manner, the subjects of philosophy, and, in particular, the theory of rhetoric. The Roman language was not only enlarged, it was also fixed and settled, by the writings of Cicero. To this, however, many illustrious writers contributed very greatly about the same period; above all, Cæsar and Varro, by their grammatical writings. Next to Cicero, these had certainly the greatest part in the formation of the proper literature of Rome; Cæsar, by the improvement which Roman speakers derived from the example of his eloquence in the senate, but still more by the labour which he bestowed on giving to the language of which he was so perfectly master, a scientific shape and consistency, and so enabling it to effect its purposes with greater power and certainty in time to come; Varro, scarcely less than Cæsar, by his extensive erudition and the formation of his great library, as well as by his profound investigations of antiquities and language. The united excellencies of these three authors entitle the age in which they lived to be considered as the most important epoch of Roman literature. I have already endeavoured to give a very short sketch of the most remarkable Roman writers down to the time of Trajan. The panegyric of that prince by the younger Pliny may be considered as the last exertion of the flourishing literature of Rome. His virtues were well deserving of such a celebration; but Roman

eloquence, after this successful attempt, soon sank into a state of utter decline. The imbecility of the imitators of Pliny was as remarkable as the inferiority of the despicable tyrants whom they panegyrised, to the manly virtues of Trajan.

The classical period of the Roman literature, then, reckoning from the consulate of Cicero till the death of Trajan, included no more than one hundred and eighty years. Within the same period, also, the science of jurisprudence, the only original intellectual possession of great value to which the Romans can lay undisputed claim, received its first development, and began to assume the appearance of a science. Cicero and Cæsar were both impressed with a sense of the necessity which, even in their time, existed for collecting into a complete body, and arranging in a perspicuous manner, the immense and discouraging masses of Roman statutes: under Augustus, and in the reigns immediately following his, both departments of jurisprudence—that of strict law on the one hand, and that of equity on the other—began to be valued according to their merits, and to have the limits of their respective application ascertained. It was reserved for Hadrian, by the publication of a complete code, (the *perpetual edict*, as it was called,) to accomplish that which had been the object of wish, rather than of hope, both to Cicero and Cæsar.

With Hadrian there commences a period altogether new, not only in the principles of government, but also in the general mode of thinking adopted by the Roman people. The Greek language and literature began daily to recover the attention which was due to them, to receive ample atonement for the neglect under which they had for some time lain, and to secure for themselves an ever increasing intellectual dominion over the whole civilized world—united as that now was, in a political point of view, under the government of the Roman Cæsars.

While the Roman writers of any note were becoming every day fewer after the time of Trajan, and while of

these even the best were at all times unworthy of being compared for a moment with those of the ages which preceded them, the fate of Grecian letters exhibited an exactly opposite appearance. The literature and philosophy of Greece seemed, about the very period when these were utterly extinguished among the Romans, to have received a new life, and an accession of universal intellectual activity. There grew up forthwith a rich after-crop of Grecian genius, not altogether unworthy, either with regard to its substance or its appearance, of the richer harvest that had gone before it; at all events, incomparably superior to any thing which had been produced for some ages immediately preceding. In poetry, it is true, it does not appear that any thing either very new or very excellent sprung up among them; but to atone for this, philosophy and rhetoric (things which in the old Attic period were regarded as altogether separate and irreconcilable) began now to be studied with unprecedented ardour, and blended together into the most complete co-operation. The old Socratic method of treating philosophical subjects (a method of which we have the best specimens in the dialogues of Plato) could now no longer be adopted; the manners and mode of life which that method took for granted had entirely passed away, and that simple form of philosophising was altogether unsuitable for those which had succeeded them. The scientific and rigid accuracy of Aristotle was at all times adapted only for a few. The consequence was, that there arose a more rhetorical manner of treating scientific subjects, which continued in fashion from the reign of Hadrian and the two Antonines, down to the Emperor Julian, and which has been adopted even in these modern times, by a great many writers of distinguished eminence. And here I may remark, in passing, that the Greeks displayed, indeed, at some particular periods, the highest reach and inventive-ness of poetical genius; but that rhetoric was, beyond all question, the art most peculiarly their own. It was born with them, and remained even truly and indisputably theirs

from the earliest times till the latest: if now and then it seemed as if it had deserted them, it was only to spring up again under some other form, and to cling to them yet more fervently than before.

Among the great crowd of writers belonging to this latter period of ancient Greek literature, who are in general useful only as sources of historical information, or as supplying, in some measure, the place of those older and better works out of which they derived their materials, we find, nevertheless, some few who possess a value more universal, and more their own. Of these, the first is Plutarch, whose *Lives*, with all their defects in writing, as well as in thought, have brought down to the modern world a true treasure of moral wisdom, which is even, at the present day, altogether invaluable. His style is overladen, and not unfrequently corrupt. Among the overflowing fulness of remarks with which he has garnished the lives of his heroes, we must be careful to make our selection: there are among them not a few which are altogether unsuitable and childish. On the whole, however, Plutarch shows himself every where to have been a man of the most praiseworthy intentions, and one who had, so far at least as morals are concerned, made himself master of the whole riches of the flourishing and classical ages of Greece, was familiar with all the disputes, and penetrated with all the most dignified conceptions of the old sages of his country. In Lucian, again, we find the clearest evidence, that the true elegance of Greek style, and the spirit of the Attic wit, had not yet altogether passed away. There are few authors, of any age or country, who can be put in the same rank with Lucian as writers of satirical and miscellaneous philosophy. His highest value, however, consists, without doubt, in his pictures of manners. Even in history, Arrian (who has been commonly called the best historian of Alexander) deserves, on account of his beautiful and unaffected style, to be placed near Xenophon. And Marcus Aurelius occupies so great and glorious a place in the history of the human kind, that the meditations of

this last of the great and virtuous of Roman sovereigns, written as they are in the Greek language, and exhibiting the most perfect acquaintance with the philosophy of the Stoics, must always be sought after with great curiosity, and dwelt upon with the profoundest interest, by every lover of virtue, as well as of letters.

The history of the unworthy successors of Marcus Aurelius, is written by Herodian in a style which we could scarcely have looked for at the period in which he lived.

Antoninus Pius was the first who introduced into the Roman empire the Greek philosophers of different sects as instruments of education, and enlisted, so to speak, that important body of men in the service of the state. Philosophy, particularly that of the Stoics, was now called in to prop up, if possible, or, at least, to supply the place of that popular belief which was hurrying irresistibly to its ruin. How much the belief in the old gods had become sunk and weakened—how widely doubt, freethinking, and infidelity had now become spread abroad in the Roman world—we can gather without difficulty from Lucian. But the true type of that universal fermentation of opinions, and restless activity of enquiry, which distinguished this age, must be sought for in the most undisguised of all ancient sceptics—Sextus Empiricus. We may also learn from Lucian, how prevalent, at the same period, was the propensity to superstition,—by what rapid strides a sort of philosophical credulity began to take the place of the old poetical credulity of the popular creed; how a belief in astrology, and a leaning to the magical sciences, were fostered by the ruling influence of secret societies and brotherhoods, till at last they were openly professed in the writings, as well as oral communications, of the philosophic teachers of the day. The influence of oriental opinions and principles was, indeed, becoming every day more powerful, and this introduced not only a more near acquaintance with the old and pure fountains of truth, but also a stream of wilder superstitions than could have sprung out of the cold soil of the west. We can trace

this tendency to orientalism even in the architecture of the age of Hadrian, which was remarkable for its recurrence to an almost Egyptian massiness. Plutarch, although classed among the followers of Plato, exhibits the Platonic philosophy under an aspect altogether new : when she had begun to embrace within her range all the rules of those original Egyptian doctrines which were at that time ascribed to Pythagoras, and to approximate more and more nearly to all the relics of that old oriental wisdom, from which Plato himself had derived the most sublime of his conceptions.

This new Platonic philosophy very soon came to be the only one in vogue : the other sects, such as the Sceptical, the Epicurean, and even the Stoical, ceased to preserve their distinct and individual appearance. Yet not a few of the peculiar opinions of the Stoics entered into the composition of this inclusive philosophy of the later Greeks, which derived, from the chief of its component parts, the name of New-Platonic. It was this philosophy which, for a long time, contended against Christianity with the most violent exertions of intellectual strength—which had hopes, in the days of the Emperor Julian, of acquiring an entire victory, of preserving unbroken the old popular creed, and infusing into *it* the elements of a new life, by interpreting its allegories, and spiritualising its personifications.

This contest between Christianity and the heathenish philosophy—between the old polytheism and the new belief, a poetical mythology and a religion of morality—is the most remarkable intellectual contest which has ever been exhibited and determined among the human race. It forms not only the wall of partition between the two worlds—the ages of antiquity which terminated in it, and these of modern times which sprung out of it ; in the history of all culture, it is the keystone upon which every thing hangs ; in the history of the development of the human intellect, it is the central point from which all illumination must be derived. To set before you this great contest with that clearness at which a complete history of literature ought to aim, to point



out its influence not only on language and art, but also on the fate of nations and the general destiny of man, would require limits which are far beyond my reach. To give any idea of it which can be at all satisfactory, it is necessary that I should begin with some enquiries into the peculiar spirit of the Greek philosophy; that I should point out the place which the Christian doctrines and Scriptures occupy in the history of the human mind; and that I should briefly explain the nature of those other relics of oriental wisdom, which are in part in harmony with the doctrines of Moses and of Christ, and were in part the most ancient fountains from which the sublime visions of the Greek sages were derived.

Concerning those minor results of this contest, which may be termed the ornamental; concerning the relative influence of the two religions on the beautiful fictions of poetry and the progress of the imitative arts, I shall at present say nothing. Many opportunities will occur in the sequel, not, indeed, of doing justice to these topics, but, at least, of apologising for the deficiency both of my plan and my execution. For the present, I must confine myself altogether to one topic, to which, by an irresistible and inborn curiosity, we are at all times compelled to devote our first enquiries—which we never cease to consider as the great hinge on which the whole history and revolutions of the human intellect depend.

Plato and Aristotle were the two greatest masters,—it may even be said, that they alone mark on every side the limits of the knowledge of the Greeks. Plato treated of philosophy altogether as an art, Aristotle as a science. In the first, we see the thinking faculties in the calm state of contemplation, reposing with awful admiration on the spectacle of Divine perfection. But Aristotle considers intellect as something perpetually at work, and delights to trace its unceasing operations, not only as the moving power of human thought and being, but also as the secret principle of the activity of Nature, and the master-spring of all her most



varied demonstrations. Plato is the model of Greek art; Aristotle furnishes the best idea of Grecian science.

When Plato enters the lists against the Sophists, and pursues them into the mazes of their errors, he displays great acuteness and nicety of penetration; but with all his Attic taste, and all his fineness of understanding, with all the clearness, and all the skilful adaptation of his language, he becomes not unfrequently dark and sophistical, like those against whom he strives. But the leading principle of his philosophy is at all times clear and perceptible. From an original and infinitely more lofty and intellectual state of existence, there remains to man (according to the philosophy of Plato) a dark remembrance of divinity and perfection. This inborn and implanted recollection of the godlike, remains ever dark and mysterious; for man is surrounded by the sensible world which, being in itself changeable and imperfect, encircles him with images of imperfection, changeableness, corruption, and error, and thus casts perpetual obscurity over that light which is within him. Wherever in the sensible and natural world he perceives any thing which bears a resemblance to the Godhead, which can serve as a symbol of the highest perfection, the old recollections of his soul are awakened and refreshed. The love of the beautiful fills and animates the soul of the beholder with an awe and reverence which belong not to the beautiful itself—at least not to any sensible manifestation of it—but to that unseen original of which material beauty is the type. From this admiration, this new awakened recollection, and this instantaneous inspiration, spring all higher knowledge and truth. These are not the product of cold, leisurely, and voluntary reflection, but occupy at once a station far superior to what either thought, or art, or speculation can attain; and enter into our inmost souls with the power and presence of a gift from the Divinity.

Plato, therefore, considers all knowledge of the Godhead and divine things as only to be derived from higher and supernatural sources; and this is the distinguishing charac-

teristic of all his philosophy. The dialectical part of his works is only the *negative*, in which he combats and overthrows error with great art; or, with art yet greater and yet more inimitable, leads us step by step towards the fountainhead of truth. But where it is his purpose to reveal this itself—that is in the *positive* part of his works—he expresses his meaning altogether after the fashion of his oriental masters—in emblems, and fables, and poetical mysteries,—ever true to his belief in supernatural means of knowledge, and acting in all things as if he were really the organ of some inspiring and awful revelation. It is not to be denied that his philosophy is essentially incomplete, and that he himself seems never to have attained perfect clearness and precision in his conceptions. This is sufficiently evident from the ill-defined limits assigned, in all his writings, to *reason* on the one hand, and *love* or *inspiration* on the other. When he speaks of the love of the beautiful, and of divine inspiration,—when he expressly acknowledges that these are the only conductors to all sublimer truths, and asserts, that they elevate us far beyond the cold regions of human reason and reflection, and reveal to us something far more lofty than these could ever reach,—we are willing to believe that Plato had conceptions, at once lively and feeling, of God and his perfections. But, on the other hand, when he exerts only his dialectic art, he often sinks into the common errors of his brethren, and seems as if he acknowledged no higher idea of perfection than is to be found in that of an unchangeable and unoccupied unity of reason. It is true, that in all this he was much limited and fettered by the influence and opinions of the older philosophers. In general however, his philosophy remained at all times as imperfect as he left it,—attributing all knowledge of divine truth to vague individual recollections, and expressing it only in dark hints and forebodings—having, in short, no higher merit than that of ingrafting on the old Greek philosophy, and adorning with all the beauty of Attic art, and all the shrewdness of Socratic ethics, some obscure recollections of

the old eastern wisdom, and some mysterious presentiments of the doctrines of Christianity.

The connexion of Plato with Socrates, in some degree, indeed, kept both him and his immediate followers in Athens free from falling into the extreme of mysticism and enthusiasm. His disciples were, indeed, sensible in some measure of the imperfection of his system, but this discovery only tended to drive them backward to the old refuges of doubt and scepticism. That leaning to mysticism, however, which was so conspicuous in his later followers, was in fact inherent in the mode and substance of their master's principles. It is almost impossible that any one should receive the doctrine of a supernatural source of knowledge in the undefined manner in which he has shadowed it out,—as a dark recollection—a mysterious inspiration—a lofty intercourse with the heavens—without falling into the same errors for which the New-Platonists are remarkable. To put an end to this, it was absolutely necessary that something altogether different, and much more steadfast, should appear—something which might elevate wavering and uncertain forebodings of the truth to the rank of consistent rules of thinking; and elicit from a world of unsatisfying dreams, a sane and rational belief, worthy of forming a rule and standard for the whole life of man.

When the later followers of Plato made a systematic attempt to enlarge his imperfect philosophy by a more liberal adoption of oriental opinions, the mode in which they conducted their endeavour was, indeed, often little in unison with the Attic taste and Socratic spirit of Plato himself. But they did nothing which was really at variance with the essence of his philosophy, and the recognised principle of a higher source of knowledge. Upon that principle, indeed, all the doctrines and relics of oriental wisdom were more or less dependant.

The great principle of Aristotle is by no means so easy to be discovered as that of Plato; and the reason of this must be sought for in his obscurity, a thing which has been

complained of from the oldest times, and by his most fervent admirers. Yet the result of every man's study of the spirit of his philosophy must, I apprehend, be very nearly the same, and must be sufficiently consistent with this universally acknowledged and lamented obscurity. How then happens it, that this mighty spirit, this perfect master, both of thought and of language—this most acute judge and perspicuous reasoner in regard to all which lies within the limit of experience—this great and inventive genius, who may be said to have discovered the proper application of the instrument, thought—who first reduced reasoning to principles, and reflection to a system ; how comes it that *he* should answer these most essential and important questions, which man never ceases to propose : concerning the destiny and origin of the human race—concerning God and the universe,—in a manner so dark, unintelligible, and unsatisfactory? The cause of this was his rejection of all other sources of knowledge excepting only reason and experience. The higher source of knowledge by Plato appeared to him unsatisfying and unscientific. To reconcile reason and experience he had recourse to many intermediate contrivances. So fond, indeed, was he of the intermediate, that he defines virtue itself the middle point between two extremes, and explains every moral evil as being either too much or too little. In his scientific discourses concerning the external world, that he may avoid that ancient difficulty which arises out of the unchangeableness of eternal nature, and the perpetual variation in the visible creation, he betakes himself to a similar solution. He admits that the first cause—the godlike principle of motion—is, indeed, in itself immoveable ; and that in our sublunary world every thing is subject to the laws of perpetual variety and mutation ; but he thinks he has found an explanation of all our difficulties when he has discovered that between those two states of things there exists yet another world—the world of stars—wherein there is to be seen, neither the perfect unmovedness of divinity, nor the perpetual changeableness of earthly things,

but something intermediate—a motion which is immutable, and eternal revolutions regulated by the most unvarying laws. In like manner, to fill up the great void between the source of reason, he introduces the idea of a passive and suffering understanding, an objective common sense between them both. All this may be deserving of much admiration, so far as the invention and acuteness alone of the philosopher are to be taken into consideration, even although we should find them, upon the whole, productive of little satisfaction. Nay, this method of philosophising might be productive of the best consequences, when applied to any separate object which it is wished thoroughly to examine and scrutinise exactly as it stands. But with regard to those high questions to which I have above alluded—questions which it is impossible for human beings at any time to pass over as uninteresting—whose object is to clear up those mysteries which hang over the destination of man, the nature of God, and the government of the world,—with regard to all these, it is not in the power either of experience or of reason to afford any satisfactory reply. The experience of the senses leads only to denial and unbelief; the reason is soon bewildered in itself, and can yield no better answer than a set of unintelligible formulas, to questions which are at once simple, unavoidable, and impressive. The philosophy of Aristotle partakes of both these defects, and is ever hesitating in the midst between baseless idealism and the system of experience; if we consider the greater part of his works and enquiries, particularly those in which he treats of the natural sciences and of morals, it appears as if the latter were preponderant; and Aristotle takes his station at the head of all the empirical philosophers of antiquity, not only on account of the extent of his knowledge, but also on account of the skilfulness of his inquiries, and admirable principles of investigation which he has laid down. But, on the other hand, the fundamental idea of all his higher philosophy and metaphysics is, without doubt, that of a self-

directing activity or *entelechia*. If, however, we cannot find in his works any true and consistent exposition of the system of the universe, but only separate inquiries concerning its individual parts—if, when we expect a definition of the universe or the first cause, we are always sure to be put off with some empty formula or bare abstraction; we must not forget that these are the faults, not of Aristotle's intellect, but of the system which he adopted. These are errors into which all philosophers, both ancient and modern, have fallen, who pretended to explain every thing by human reason or experience, and would admit of no higher fountain of knowledge, no divine revelation or tradition of the truth.

Those who have, in philosophy, followed the path of Aristotle, or one very similar to his, are indeed innumerable. It is true that he had in the times of antiquity comparatively few professed followers; it is also true that there was a time in which, although a whole legion of disciples in all the schools, both of the east and the west, acknowledged his authority, his true spirit remained a secret to all his admirers. Since that period it has become the fashion to lay to the blame of this great philosopher not a few of the errors of his blundering disciples, and to vilify and under-rate the Stagyræite with the same sort of prejudiced ignorance which formerly led men to deify and adore him. But in every age, and even down to our own times, there have been many who, without being themselves conscious of it, have been steadfast adherents of Aristotle—many of these altogether, or very nearly so, unacquainted with his writings, and not a few who have the appearance of being his most deadly enemies and opponents. I allude to those, on the one hand, who, pursuing the course of deep self-consideration, have been betrayed into the same error of unintelligible idealism; and, on the other, to all those who, from Locke downwards, acknowledge, even in philosophy, no source of knowledge but experience. These last, whenever they attempt scientific experiment, find themselves incap-

able of making any progress without some abstract ideas, and so fall into the same errors of formality which are the chief defects of Aristotle.

These two great spirits, then, Plato and Aristotle, may be said to have given, in some measure, a shape and form to the whole range of human thought. They were, indeed, but ill-appreciated by their contemporaries, but perhaps even for that reason their influence has been greater in the after world, of whose spirit they had for many ages the almost exclusive direction, not only in all matters of abstract science, but also in every thing that relates to the philosophy of human life. Even now, after the human intellect has become two thousand years older, and been extended and enriched by so many discoveries—while the number of books which Plato could have read appears to us as nothing, surrounded as we are by immense libraries of ancient erudition and modern acuteness—while we look down upon the opinions of Aristotle concerning the system of the world as altogether nugatory and childish—while we are in the possession of a religion which has taught us more lofty conceptions of God, and more profound knowledge of ourselves—it is strange enough that, even in the present day, these two master-spirits still maintain their ground of pre-eminence, and stand out as the great landmarks of intellect. All philosophy is either Peripateticism or Platonism, or an attempt, more or less successful, to reconcile them. He that confesses any higher tradition of truth, or fountain of knowledge, is, without all question, pursuing the footsteps of Plato; and this he may do without any sort of servility, for the system of Plato is by no means one of confinement and narrowness, but a liberal and Socratic guide to all manner of investigations and researches. For those, on the other hand, who adopt the course of reason and experience, it will always be impossible to go much further than Aristotle has gone. In his own way and his own department he is great and unrivalled. The world can exhibit few spirits which so comprehended the whole expe-



rience of their age, and required such an intellectual supremacy over it, as his. He handles reason as an instrument, with a dexterity of which I know no other example.

Out of these two elements was the later philosophy of the Greeks compounded: it was excellent in art and comprehensive in science, but for the truth it was at the best unsatisfactory. In it the spirit of Plato was predominant; and the utmost which was aimed at was to supply his want of scientific form from Aristotle, and his more serious defect of conception from the different opinions and traditions of the orientals.

The Greek philosophy was at all times very different from the oriental: it was more directed to the external appearances of life, to the beautiful, and to the forms of art. Yet, in the midst of a self-satisfaction and national vanity, which we easily pardon to this remarkable people, we find that their more profound enquirers, both in the earlier and later periods of their history, were not without a high reverence for the depth and sublimity of the eastern wisdom. The chief object of their consideration in these matters was Egypt, from which they, at all times, confessed that their own peculiar theology and traditions were derived. In the remoter background of their intellectual world lay India. The belief of the Hebrews remained always infinitely more foreign to them, and their mode of thinking was equally remote from having any connexion with the religion of the Persians. With the Egyptians, the Phœnicians, and the inhabitants of Asia Minor, on the contrary, they were connected by the tie of one common religion, which, with many points of difference in the detail, was in fact, in all matters of serious principle and import, radically and essentially the same. The whole of the other known nations of antiquity were, indeed, separated from the Hebrews, and in part also from the Persians, by the difference of their religions. As the Mosaic writings were rendered into Greek in the time of the great Ptolemy Philadelphus, it is possible, indeed, that many critics before



Longinus felt and admired their sublimity—endeavoured, as has been often done since, to give to Moses a Platonic interpretation,—or even, as has also been a favourite notion with many moderns, attempted to trace the doctrines of Plato to an acquaintance with the Hebrew Scriptures. But, upon the whole, the belief and the morality of the Hebrews, as also in later times the doctrines of Christianity, remained altogether foreign to the notions of the Greeks and Romans. They knew not what to make of these remarkable novelties; and even after a more intimate acquaintance in the sequel, they never wrote as if they were at home in them. Nor could it well be otherwise, where even the first and most simple views concerning the origin of man and his being, as well as concerning the sources of all knowledge, and the purpose of all wisdom, were so diametrically opposite and inconsistent. According to the ruling belief of the Greeks and Romans, the first of the human race sprung up every where like vegetables—or rather in the same manner that the heat of the sun calls out living things from mud and refuse: mere manifestations of that activity and fermentation which is inherent in nature, and leads her to produce crude and imperfect creatures, rather than to produce nothing at all. In this mode of treating the subject, one element of the human being—earth—received too great a degree of consideration; the other, and more dignified element—the godlike spark in the human frame—was viewed as the result of a theft from heaven, and the reward of a successful knavery. Moses, on the other hand, taught that man grew not up every where and by chance, but was framed and fashioned by the hand of God himself out of the earth, in one particular spot; and that the spark of divinity with which he is animated was not the fruit of robbery or audacity, but freely communicated to him by the love of his Maker. This doctrine affords the best clue to the history of man and that of his mind, and also the best point to which we may refer all the other traditions, and all the other doctrines of the East. According

to it, the oldest dwelling of the human race, and the scene of their earliest development, lies in the Middle Asia—between the Euphrates and the Tigris, the Gihon, the Ganges, and the South Sea; the present race of men are entirely separated from that early people by an universal catastrophe of natural desolation. The nations which have become again cultivated since this catastrophe, may all be referred to three great families, remarkably distinguished from each other by their spirit and character. The first is one spread abroad, for the most part, in that same Middle Asia, and from the earliest date more enlightened than the others. The second is a race diffused principally over the north, of peoples more rude, indeed, but at the same time less corrupted and debauched in their manners, and on that account destined to derive, in after times, the chief benefit from the more early civilisation of their eastern neighbours. The last, a race of men which had, indeed, a very early part in all higher knowledge and refinement, but sunk, even in the oldest times, into unworthiness and neglect, from their fearful moral corruptions, and that mental bewildering and apathy to which these gave birth. This account of Moses is so confirmed to us by all the monuments and testimonies of antiquity to which we have access, is so extended and strengthened by every inquiry which we pursue, that it is well entitled to be viewed as the foundation of all historical truth. The two component parts of our revelation—the Mosaic and the Christian—form, in different ways, the two centre points of the history of the human race. Christianity gave to the whole civilized world of the Romans a new creed, new manners, and new laws, an altogether new morality—and thereby, in the sequel, (for all art and science must ever proceed from the mode of thinking and the mode of life, and ever keep in harmony with these,) a new and a peculiar system, both of science and of art. The Mosaic remains, on the other hand, can alone enable us to occupy the right position from which all the other wisdom of the eastern nations should be surveyed. Not that the civilisa-

tion of some other nations was not, in time, precedent to that of the Hebrews. That such was the case among the Egyptians we have irrefragable proof in those giant works of architecture, those monuments which are still surveyed by modern travellers with the same feelings of awe and astonishment which they excited, more than two thousand years ago, in the breasts of Herodotus and Plato. Even before Moses there were hieroglyphics; and he says of himself, that "he was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." With right were science and art (which are vessels chosen to contain heavenly wisdom, and to be subservient to it alone) soon taken away from the Egyptians, who confined them both within the narrowest limits, and converted them to the most unworthy of purposes. The Mosaic writings possess this advantage over all other oriental works, that they alone present to our view the well-head of truth in its original purity and clearness. But our modern philosophers have been very unwilling to confess this, and attempted every possible method by which they might avoid the result. Some have ascribed all wisdom to the Egyptians, in the same manner which was practised by many of the ancient Greeks. Others have magnified beyond all bounds the merits of the Chinese, extolled their government and mode of life as the most perfect, and the morality of their Confucius as the most pure. Others, again, have pleased themselves with the fiction of an Atlantic antiquity in the North; and some have allowed themselves to be so much carried away by their admiration of the profoundness and beauty of the old Indian books, as to embrace the palpably fabulous chronology of the Brahmins, and thereby to set all criticism for ever at defiance. In short, there is no absurdity which some men will not swallow, rather than repose their belief on the simple truth which is before them.

Among all those peoples which had any share in that intellectual cultivation of the east—whose high antiquity is attested by Egyptian, Persian, and Indian monuments—the

Persians were, in their religious belief, and the character of their traditions, most akin to the Hebrews, and, of consequence, most unlike to the Greeks. Under the mild and friendly protection of the Persian monarch, the scattered people of the Hebrews were again gathered together, and their temple rose out of its ruins. The Persians, on the contrary, bore as great an aversion as the Hebrews ever did to the worship of the Egyptians; and it was their desire utterly to extirpate it, which alone occasioned their government to have an appearance of oppression in Egypt, to which it was altogether a stranger in every other district of their dominions. Long before the Greek, Gelon, with that humanity which was natural to his nation, made it a necessary preliminary to a treaty with the Carthaginians, that they should "abstain in future from all sacrifices of men," the Persian king, Darins, had forbidden that abomination from motives of religion. The Persians honoured and recognised the same God of light and truth whom the Hebrews worshipped, although, indeed, much fiction, much mythology, and not a little of essential error, was mingled with their knowledge of the truth. In the sacred Scriptures themselves Cyrus is styled the servant of the Lord, a phrase which no gratitude could ever have induced any Hebrew to apply to an Egyptian Pharaoh. The whole system of life of the Persians, and all the institutions of their monarchy, were founded upon this belief. The monarch was supposed to be as a sun of righteousness, a visible emblem of deity and eternal light; the seven first princes of the empire were meant to shadow out the *Amhaspand*, or those seven unseen powers which, as the first in the spiritual world, have sway over the different powers and regions of external nature. Such conceptions as these were altogether foreign to the Greeks. The same Syrian king who persecuted with such severity the Hebrews, and endeavoured to compel them to embrace the Grecian superstitions, was also the persecutor of the Persian faith. Even Alexander was desirous of rooting out the order of the magi, not surely because they

as individuals were obnoxious to his government, but because the doctrines of their faith stood directly in the way of his great design. His purpose was to blend Greeks and Persians into one people, and, indeed, it is evident enough, that by no half measures could this end be accomplished. It was absolutely necessary either that the Greeks should adopt the worship of fire, and desert those temples of which the army of Xerxes destroyed so many, and which all Persians abhorred as the instruments of superstition and idolatry; or that the doctrine of Zoroaster should be extirpated, and the Greek or Egyptian worship be received by the Persian people.

The essential error of the Persian creed consisted in this, that acknowledging, as was fit, the existence of a power hostile to light and goodness, they did not extend their views so far as to perceive the insignificance of this power, however great its influence may appear to be both on men and on nature, when compared with that of the Deity, against which it contends: in short, that this creed acknowledges two original principles—a good Godhead and an evil.

Several speculators of our modern times have been so much impressed with this resemblance between the faith of the Persians and that of the Hebrews, that they have found it incapable of being denied, and confined all their exertions to explaining it. They have said that the Hebrews, during their seventy years' captivity in the dominions of the great king, borrowed much, or rather perhaps learned all for the first time, from the Persians among whom they lived. This wilful perversion must appear in its proper colours to the mere historical inquirer; he will at once perceive the absurdity of representing the connexion between Persians and Hebrews as something so young and modern, which he can learn both from the evidence of the two nations and from the nature of the thing itself—that in truth that connexion was a matter of much higher antiquity, and is one deserving of much more serious consideration than the authors of this superficial hypothesis were aware. Besides,

the conception of it has arisen from a most mistaken view of the whole question at issue. The superiority of the Hebrews over all the other Asiatic peoples consists solely and simply in this,—that they alone preserved that original truth and higher knowledge which was intrusted to them, pure and unfalsified, with the strongest faith, in blind confidence and submission—like a precious pledge, or a possession often locked up against their own use—and so transmitted it to posterity unbroken and unimpaired; while among all other nations these things were either altogether forgotten or abandoned, or mixed up with the wildest fictions and the most odious errors and abominations. This, it may be thought, is a merely negative sort of pre-eminence: whatever it is, it belongs entirely to the sacred writings of the Hebrews, and in particular to those of Moses. In these writings, whatever is meant to be a practical law to the nation, is expressed with the greatest accuracy and precision. That part of the commencement of the narrative which regards the internal man is also universally intelligible, in so much that it can be easily comprehended by the most ignorant—by a savage, or by a child almost as soon as he has the power of speech. All that regards universal history, the ramifications of our race, and the early fate of men, (so far as these have any connexion with our religious belief,) is most clear and perspicuous. Whatever, on the other side, can serve only as an amusement of our curiosity, is wrapped by Moses in obscurity and mystery. What he tells us with hieroglyphical brevity concerning the ten first fathers of the primitive world, has been spun out by the Persians, the Indians, and the Chinese, into whole volumes of mythology, and been invested with a crowd of half poetical, half metaphysical traditions. The praise of a more ardent and poetical fancy, and of more inventive metaphysics, as well as of a deeper acquaintance with nature and her powers, we may easily grant to the Persians. In all those ends, also, to which these are subservient, as also in astronomy, the imitative arts, or in general

in whatever became an object of great study among any of the other oriental nations, the inferiority of the Hebrews may also be admitted. But if we are perplexed with any of those dark questions which make man tremble to look into futurity, where, among any other nation, shall we find such answers as the Hebrews can point to us in their narrative of the sorrows of Job?—a piece of writing, which, considered merely as such, is without doubt one of the most characteristic and sublime which has come down to us from the ancient world. That peculiar faith and confidence in God, which were the inheritance of the Jews, are expressed with less of the Mosaic mystery as we advance in the sacred volume, and appear in their full light in the psalms of David, the allegories of Solomon, and the prophecies of Isaiah. These works, indeed, set them forth with a splendour and a sublimity which, considered merely as poetry, excite our wonder, and disdain all comparison with any other compositions: they form a fountain of fiery and god-like inspiration of which the greatest of modern poets have never been weary of drinking—which has suggested to them their noblest images, and animated them to their most magnificent flights. Nevertheless the clearness of the Scriptures is ever a prophetic clearness, veiled in some portion of mystery, and pointing to futurity for its perfect explication. Upon the whole, the flourishing period of the Hebrews was of short duration; the Mosaic laws and rules of life were never entirely reduced to practice, for the people were at all times incapable of comprehending the purposes of their divine Lawgiver. The sanctuary, after being for many years tossed about with the changeful destinies of a chastened people, appeared, under Solomon, in the shape of a temple. But this was soon destroyed through the guilt of the people; and although, under the protection of the Persian monarch, its walls were rebuilt and its vessels collected, the flourishing period of the Hebrew spirit was for ever gone. Like the Romans, the Jews also were incapable of resisting the overwhelming torrent of the



opinions, education, and language of the Greeks. If we look merely to the poetical part of the Persian religion, its resemblance is much greater, in that respect, to the northern than to the Grecian theology. The same spiritual veneration of nature, of light, of fire, and of the other pure elements which are set forth in the laws and liturgies of the Zendavesta, breathe in a form more entirely poetical out of the Edda of our ancestors. The same sort of opinions concerning those spirits which rule and fill nature, have given rise to the same sort of fictions concerning giants, dwarfs, and other extraordinary beings, both in the old northern sagas, and in the still more ancient poetry of the Persians.

The high antiquity of the Indian mythology is in the main sufficiently manifest from the ancient monuments of Indian architecture which are still in existence. These monuments are, in their gigantic size and in their general formation, extremely similar to those of the Egyptians; and it is difficult to suppose that their antiquity is not equally remote. All these monuments, both the gigantic works of Egypt covered over with hieroglyphics, the fragments of the city of Persepolis with their various shapes and unintelligible inscriptions, and lastly, those Indian rocks, which we may still see hewn into the symbols of an obscure mythology, have an equal tendency to carry us back to a state of things from which we feel ourselves to be prodigiously removed both in time and in manners. We may almost say, that as the traditions of every people go back to an age of heroes, and as nature, too, has had her time of ancient greatness—a time of mighty revolutions whereof we can still perceive the traces, and gigantic animals of which we are every day digging up the remains,—even so both civilisation and poetry have had their time also of the wonderful and the gigantic. And we may add that, in that time, all those conceptions, fictions, and presentiments which were afterwards unfolded into poetry, and fashioned into philosophy and literature; all the knowledge and all the errors of our species—astronomy,

chronology, biography, history, theology, and legislation—were embodied, not in writing, as among us puny men, but in those enormous works of sculpture of which some fragments still remain for our inspection. Of the two great heroic poems of the Indians which are still in existence, the one treats of the achievements of Ramo the conqueror of that southern and more savage part of the Peninsula which lies nearest to the island of Ceylon. Ramo is the favourite hero of the nation ; he is represented in all the majesty and fulness of youthful strength, beauty, nobility, and love, but for the most part unfortunate, and in exile, exposed to unlooked for dangers, and oppressed with sorrows and afflictions. This is the same character which, however diversified by local colouring, is to be found in all beautiful and remarkable traditions, of whatever nation and under whatever climate. In the bloom of youth and beauty—on the very summit of victory, power, and joy—there often seizes irresistibly on the soul of man a deep sense of the fleetingness and the nothingness of that existence which he calls his life. This heroic poem of Ramo appears to me in the state in which it is still to be found, and from the specimens of it which I have myself examined, to be a work of great beauty, holding somewhat of a middle place between the simplicity and clearness of Homer, and that profusion of fancy by which the writings of the Persian poets are distinguished. The other great Indian heroic poem which embraces the whole circle of their mythology, the Mohabharot, celebrates an universal struggle, in which gods, giants, and heroes, were all armed against each other. In some similar fictions respecting a war between gods and heroes, almost every people which possesses any ancient traditions has embodied its mysterious recollections of a wilder and more active state of nature, and the tragical suppression of an earlier world of greatness and heroism. However, lately, both of these Indian epics, the Ramayon and the Mohabharot, may have been elaborated into their present form, the essence of their poetry is unquestionably old, for it cor-

responds in all respects with those sculptured rocks and monuments which are still the objects of the hereditary veneration of the Hindoos.

When we begin to examine in what respects the doctrines of India first acquired any influence in Europe, we shall naturally have our attention directed, in the first place, to the remarkable dogma of Metempsychosis, which was said to have been introduced into Greece by Pythagoras. Among the Greeks, this doctrine remained at all times foreign and unpopular. Among the Indians, on the contrary, it seems to have been believed from the earliest periods wherein we can perceive any trace of the existence of their nation. We might even say, that not only all the opinions, but also all the manners, of the Indians, are at this hour built upon this doctrine. In India, it is the first article of faith, which it was not in Egypt, where, although Pythagoras may very probably have heard of it, it could never have acquired any regular belief or authority, unless I am extremely mistaken in what I imagine must be collected from the very peculiar treatment of the dead which was prevalent among the Egyptians. A certain almost painful aversion, and religious horror, for the bodies of the dead, is so deeply implanted in all men, that nothing is more difficult than to diminish in us the influence of this feeling. The prevailing modes of treating the dead among different nations, are not only worthy of great consideration as testimonies of their modes of thinking and degrees of civilization; they are, in general, over and above all this, very intimately connected with their secret impressions and feelings of religion. It may be worth our while to pause over them for a moment. The mode of incineration which was most followed by the Greeks, is one of very high antiquity. It is one which is very expressive of feeling, and one which has something very pleasing in it, at least for the imagination. The spirit of life ascends to heaven freely and purely among the flames; the earthy part remains behind in the ashes, and furnishes to the survivors a memorial of the departed. The most singular, and per-

haps the most elevating of all usages, was adopted by the followers of Zoroaster, and is still preserved in Thibet. From a mistaken idea that the pure elements of earth or fire would be contaminated by being made the instruments of dissolution, the corpse is laid upon a platform erected for the purpose, and enclosed with massy walls, and there abandoned as a prey to the wolves and the vultures. Interment, the mode adopted by those who profess our religion, if it be attended with proper care and attention, is, after all, perhaps the most agreeable to nature. We restore to the earth what was originally derived from it, and intrust to her motherly bosom, the earthly body, as a seed sown for futurity. When we know that the body itself is actually lying there, we have a more easy, as well as a more impressive, conviction of the repose of the soul, than when we are obliged to entomb our feelings in a cenotaph, or see the body of our friend reduced at once to the simple nature of the elements. The remarkable embalming of the Egyptian mummies is, in my apprehension, irreconcilable with a belief in the Indian doctrine of transmigration. That usage seems rather to set forth an indistinct feeling, that this apparently dead matter is still important to the man—some mistaken and imperfect presentiment, that the bond between the soul and matter is not altogether dissolved, and shall yet one day be restored—that even this matter shall have its portion in immortality, and be again animated and awaked. Others have explained this Egyptian usage as if it proceeded from a material way of thinking; as if those who disbelieved in the immortality of the soul would be the most anxious to guard against the total dissolution of the body.

The following appears to me to be a very natural supposition. In the numerous secret associations which were spread abroad over Egypt, there prevailed, without doubt, many opinions altogether irreconcilable with the popular belief, which was nowhere, indeed, more superstitious than among the Egyptians; here and there, it is probable, these

opinions contained light and truth carefully kept secret from the uninitiated; at all events, they were numerous and discordant. Pythagoras might easily have been taught in Egypt a doctrine which was originally Indian, and which, in the country to which it had been transplanted, was neither powerful nor universal.

The Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls depended, nevertheless, on the radical notion, that all beings derive their origin from God, and are placed in this world in an altogether degraded and unfortunate state of imperfection, from which state all beings, and in particular men, must either decline gradually into conditions of yet lower degradation, or rise gradually to conditions of purity more accordant with their divine original, according as they give ear to the vicious or to the virtuous suggestions of their nature. This conception was, at all events, compatible enough with the leading doctrines of that Platonic philosophy—whose general accordance with the oriental opinions, and the influence which these had on the intellectual character of the Europeans, shall be the subject of my next discourse.

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## LECTURE V.

LITERATURE, OPINIONS, AND INTELLECTUAL HABITS OF THE INDIANS—  
RETROSPECT TO EUROPE.

THE most remote country, towards the east, of which the Greeks had any defined knowledge, (and their acquaintance with it was at the best extremely imperfect,) was India. They more than once overrun it as conquerors, and at one time possessed, for a very short period, something like a fixed dominion over a part of its territory. The coasts, and those other parts of the country which were most accessible,

were explored and examined by them in a regular voyage of discovery. The commercial intercourse with Alexandria and Grecian-Egypt was one of long duration, and, without doubt, attended with a very considerable flux and reflux of intellectual communication. With China, however, and the more distant countries of the east, neither the Greeks, nor, in general, any of the ancient nations of the west, had any direct intercourse; their knowledge of these regions was, of consequence, altogether vague and unsatisfactory.

I have already given what I conceive to be the most probable explanation of the manner in which the originally Indian doctrine of the transmigration of souls was introduced into Greece, through the medium of Egypt, by Pythagoras. The Indian trade is of such antiquity, that it ascends beyond the historical records of any civilised nation. Alexander, and after him the Ptolemies, above all Philadelphus, gave to that trade a regular direction, which created the prosperity and wealth of Egypt under the rule of the Grecian dynasty. Even under the Romans, this trade still continued to follow the same channel, which is, indeed, by far the nearest and the most natural, and which, with many variations and many interruptions, was still in the main adhered to, down to the time when the circumnavigation of Africa opened up a new path to the adventurers of the west. But it is difficult to suppose that Alexander and the Ptolemies should have so easily regulated and confined this trade to the Red Sea and Alexandria, unless private enterprise had before ascertained the practicability, and even demonstrated the superior advantages of that channel. The old connexion which subsisted between India and Egypt is also sufficiently manifest from the remarkable and elsewhere unknown system of *castes* being equally adopted in both countries, and the strong general coincidence which may be observed between the mythologies of the two nations. In our own days, this ancient relation between these two peoples and their theological belief, received a very striking and sensible exemplification. When, in the course of the

last war, an Indian army was brought by the English government into Egypt, those old monuments, whose gigantic proportions are ever regarded with undiminished curiosity and wonder by Europeans, made on the minds of the Hindoo soldiers an impression no less powerful, though proceeding from a very different cause. They fell on their faces in supplication, and believed that they had again found the deities of their native land.

The very people of the Hindoos, with their manners and ideas all belonging to a remoter world, with their ancient usages, to which they cling with so much bigotry, and with their arrangement of life so widely different from that of any other nation, may be themselves regarded as a living monument, the one surviving ruin of another state of man. — Their present degradation is an object not of contempt, but of sympathy and compassion.

When Alexander made his incursion from Persia into the north of India, (a path which, before and since his time, has been the high-road of so many conquerors,) the remarkable spectacle of such a people must have made no small impression on the minds of the Greeks. Their wonder must have been no less than that of the first modern Europeans who found their way to that long-sought land. The Greeks found in India, as they had before done in Egypt, not a little that was new to them, and foreign to their manners, but they were not repelled by an altogether irreconcilable superstition, as among the Persians and the Jews. Here, as in Egypt, they found themselves still surrounded with the well-known symbols of a poetical polytheism, which, in all radical matters, manifested its kindred with their own. They even recognised, or thought they could recognise, the same deities which they had been wont to worship, although concealed under some considerable variations of form and colouring; and they showed, in the most striking manner, their faith in this coincidence, by the names of the Indian Hercules, and the Indian Bacchus, which were afterwards so common among them. They seized upon the apparent



resemblances with the enthusiasm which was natural to them, and traced them with that keenness of penetration which was no less peculiarly their own. It was, indeed, a ruling passion of the Greeks to magnify the wonders of all that they had seen : and of their talents for poetical exaggeration, we have many specimens in their accounts of those countries which were first laid open to their inspection by the conquests of Alexander. But we must not forget that many things which were looked upon as entirely fabulous by those ancient readers who perused the historians of Alexander, have, in the course of modern discoveries, received the most perfect confirmation ; exactly as has been the case with some of those yet more early accounts of Ctesias, which were regarded as the most improbable of fictions by his ignorant contemporaries at home. If we make allowance for many natural enough mistakes, and apparent contradictions with regard to particular points, the description which the Greeks have left of India, agrees, in the main, very strikingly, both with the present aspect of that country, and with the best sources of ancient information to which we have otherwise access ; insomuch, that each may reciprocally serve as a commentary on the other. The same Indian recluses, whose peculiarities are every day described to us with the utmost accuracy by missionaries and Englishmen, with whose doctrines and singular mode of life all the books and poems of the Hindoos are filled, these *gymnosophists* were found by the soldiers of Alexander exactly as they are to be seen at present, and excited in them so much astonishment that they invented a new word to describe them. The Greeks found two ruling sects of philosophers in India, the *Brachmans* and the *Samaneans*, and it is still easy to trace with clearness, in the old works and fountain-heads of ancient Indian learning, two separate systems, both originating among the Hindoos. The one of these, indeed, which was more recently introduced into India itself, although it endeavoured to keep as near as possible to the ancient doctrines, yet, as it was essentially hostile to the distinction of castes

and the exclusive authority of the Brahmins, it was never received into general favour, and has left only traces which it requires the skill of an antiquarian to discover. Its unpopularity in India, perhaps, contributed not a little to its extensive reception in Thibet, China, and the whole middle and northern districts of Asia. Even the word Samanean, by which the Greeks designated the one of the two sects which they found in India, is pure Indian, and is expressive of that internal equability and stillness of mind which is still talked of as the first step to perfection in all the ethical systems of the Indian devotees. The name of *Schaman*, which is so widely diffused over the whole middle and north of Asia, and universally applied to denote the priests and sorcerers of these regions, is evidently derived from the same origin with that Indian word which was first brought into Europe by the followers of Alexander.

The older doctrine of India is that which prescribes the worship of Brahma, and his prophet and spirit, creative thought and lawgiver, Menu. The fabulous chronology of the Brahmins is carried by them even into their literature; they ascribe all their oldest works to persons entirely fabulous, and carry them back to an antiquity which is altogether poetical. Since some European scholars, in the enthusiasm of their first admiration, have not scrupled to admit of this fabulous antiquity, it is the less wonderful that others have gone into the opposite extreme, and treated the antiquity of all Indian works as a fable. It is difficult to say which extreme is the most absurd. The code of Menu, translated into English by Sir William Jones, is, of all those Indian works which have been faithfully rendered into the European languages, the most ancient, the most authentic, and the most entire. This book of laws is one of those which, after the fashion of remote antiquity, embraces the whole of human life, and contains not only a system of morals, and a representation of manners, but also a poetical account of God and spirits, and a history of the creation of the world and man. In the same way that the Greeks of the

most ancient period, before the invention of prose writing, were accustomed to compose all their histories and narratives, all their books of instruction, their laws, and, in short, whatever they wrote, in plain verses—at times, indeed, entirely destitute of all poetical ornament; so this ancient Indian law-book is composed in a measure and distich of the most primitive simplicity. Many of its maxims are full of meaning, and several passages are extremely poetical and sublime. That strange system of life is every where depicted and prescribed, which, as I have already said, is throughout dependent on the idea of the transmigration of souls. Perhaps among no other ancient people did the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the belief in a future state of existence, ever acquire such a mastery over all principles and all feelings, and exert such influence over all the judgments and all the actions of men, as among the Indians. While, in the poetical creed of the Greeks, the world of shades occupies only a dark and remote place in the background, and leaves all the hopes and enjoyments of life to be concentrated upon the present, among the Indians the place of true prominence and reality is assigned to the future, and the earthly life is represented as at best an obscure introduction to that of heaven; every thing is viewed as preparatory to another state of things, and the present is every where depicted as dark and unsatisfying. Whatever is good in the present life is, according to the Indian opinions, only a foretaste of futurity; whatever evils we encounter are the consequences and the punishment of sins committed in some former state of being. The nearest bonds of love and nature derive from these doctrines a new force. Father and son are in their innermost being so intimately connected, that even death has no power to dissolve the union of their destinies. Marriage becomes a more sacred tie when we suppose that its endurance is not limited to a single life. It is this spirit which breathes over all the fables, and poetry, and institutions of the Indians, and which constitutes the true characteristic of

their opinions. From the descriptive poems of the Indians we must seek to gather what influence those opinions had on human life, and all its relations and feelings ; what sort of poetry, and what sort of feeling of the lovely and the beautiful, were produced among the Indians by the adoption of ideas to us so foreign and unaccountable. The first things which strike us in the Indian poetry are, that tender feeling of solitude, and the all-animated world of plants, which is so engagingly represented in the dramatic poem of the Sokuntola ; and those charming pictures of female truth and constancy, as well as of the beauty and loveliness of infantine nature, which are still more conspicuous in the older epic version of the same Indian legend.\* Neither can we observe, without wonder and admiration, that depth of moral feeling with which the poet styles conscience “the solitary seer in the heart, from whose eye nothing is hid ;” and which leads him to represent sin as something so incapable of concealment, that every transgression is not only known to conscience and all the gods, but felt with a sympathetic shudder by those elements themselves which we call inanimate—by the sun, the moon, the fire, the air, the heaven, the earth, the flood, and the deep—as a crying outrage against nature and derangement of the universe. We cannot so easily come to enjoy the descriptions of the fearful deaths of the Indian penitents, even although these are throughout diversified with many touches of tenderness and feeling, or the still more common narratives of the immolation of widows. I may perhaps be pardoned for saying a few words concerning that most singular usage of the Hindoos—one which, when the death is altogether voluntary, constitutes suicide ; when it is the consequence of half-compulsatory exhortations, constitutes human sacrifice ; and which is doubly terrible when it breaks the ties which connect the mother with her children. Europeans have not as yet been able to put a stop to this practice within the limits

\* Translated by the author, in his book “*Über die sprache und weisheit der Indier.*” § 308—324

of their government ; at least only a very few years have elapsed since instances of it occurred even in the immediate neighbourhood of Calcutta. The chief principle of the English administration in India is, indeed, nothing else than to rule the Hindoos in a manner entirely conformed to their own customs, usages, and native laws ; and by doing so—whatever instances of individual oppression may have occurred—they have, in fact, been the benefactors of the Hindoos, in delivering them from the persecutions of Mahometan intolerance. The more the English territory is extended in India, the more necessary does this systematic forbearance for all Indian usages become ; especially since a trifling violation of some prejudices of the military excited the alarming disturbance of Vellore. It is easy to see why this forbearance has been extended even to the blameable extremity of sanctioning human sacrifices and incremations. These are, indeed, but too likely to become more and more frequent, as the natives (attached as they are to their customs with the most slavish bigotry, and watching over their preservation with the most jealous solicitude) come to be more sensible of the weight which they derive from their numbers. The Brahmins, too, are, without doubt, fond of nourishing the fanaticism of the people by these tragic spectacles.

It has been often said that the practice originated in the operation of jealousy, and a regular plan for the degradation of the female sex. But I am much at a loss to conceive how this can agree with that high reverence for females which is every where inculcated in the laws, and exemplified in the poems of the Hindoos. Besides, the idea of depressing and despising the female sex is one entirely at variance even with the present opinions which prevail among them ; although, indeed, it is not improbable that the example of their Mahometan masters may have in some degree corrupted the purity of their ancient manners. Others have, and I think more happily, considered this custom of voluntary burning as akin to those death-sacrifices,

by no means uncommon among savage, and particularly among warlike peoples; in these the object was to furnish the departed ruler or hero with whatever he might be supposed to need in another life, such as his horse, his armour, and his slaves. Sometimes, also, in the agony of sorrow, the friends or the beloved of the hero plunged into the same grave, or ascended the same funeral pile with his remains, that so all that was dear to him in life might be swallowed up in one common ruin with the illustrious dead. Even in India these apparently voluntary, but often reluctant sacrifices of women, took place originally only among those of the warlike *caste*. They were never universal; in the ancient times they must have been exceedingly rare, otherwise they could scarcely have been celebrated as they are, as specimens of heroic and admirable devotion. The undoubting expectation of an immediate and personal reunion in another life, must have greatly contributed to render this sacrifice possible; but it must always be difficult to imagine how such as were mothers could venture upon it, especially when we remember, that in all representations of Hindoo life, the devoted affection of mothers for their children is described as being, if possible, carried even further than is usual among ourselves.

Of all Indian poems, so far as we are as yet acquainted with them, that of *Sokuntola* (which has been translated with the most scrupulous exactness by Jones) is the work which gives the best idea of Indian poetry: it is a speaking example of that sort of beauty which is peculiar to the spirit of their fictions. Here we see not indeed either the high and dignified arrangement, or the earnestness and strength of style, which distinguish the tragedies of the Greeks. But all is animated with a deep and lovely tenderness of feeling; an air of sweetness and beauty is diffused over the whole. If the enjoyment of solitude and musing, the delight which is excited by the beauty of nature, above all, the world of plants, are here and there enlarged upon with a gorgeous profusion of images, this is but the clothing

of innocence. The composition is throughout clear and unlaboured, and the language is full of a graceful and dignified simplicity.

The account which is given in the Indian mythology of the invention of poetry and the Indian rhythm, is entirely in harmony with the spirit of poetry such as this. The sage Balmiki, to whom one of the great heroic poems (the Ramayon) is ascribed, saw, as it is said, two lovers living happily together in a beautiful wood, when of a sudden the youth was murdered by a treacherous assault. In the midst of his sorrow at this spectacle, and his compassion for the lamentations of the deserted maiden, he broke out into words which were rhythmical : and so were elegy and the laws of versification discovered. The whole poetry of the Indians is full of inward love, tenderness, and elegy. Such, indeed, was the fit mode of telling the story of Balmiki—how Ramo, the favourite hero of India, wandered in the wilderness—how he was dragged from his beloved Sita—how she sought for him long and in vain—and how they were at last reunited. But the Indian poetry is rich also in heroic and lofty representations, and the joyful and brilliant side of life has its full share in the pictures of that comprehensive poem, which is compared in the introductory hymn to a mighty lake. “The hills of Balmiki arise out of the lake of Ramo, which is altogether free from impurities ; it abounds in clear streams, and there are bright flowers upon its waters.” But in none of the Indian poems is there so much of joy and the ardent inspiration of love as in the great pastoral of Gita Govindo. The hero of this poem is Krishnoo, when he (like the Apollo of the Greeks) wandered on the earth as a shepherd, attended by nine shepherdesses. The composition, however, is not so much an idyll, as a series of dithyrambic love songs, whose high lyrical beauties (whether the fault may be in Sir William Jones or in the English language) are by no means preserved in the translation. The import was perhaps too bold to be susceptible of any literal rendering. As it is, Jones has given us only a



faint shadow of the power of the original. Even this, however, is of great value to the lover of poetry, for he may easily draw from it some idea of the beauty of the Indian imagination. The well-known book of fables, *Hipotadesa*, on the contrary, is rendered with the utmost accuracy. It is the first fountain from which all books of fables are derived. Its narrative is distinguished by the most artless simplicity and clearness, but interspersed here and there with profound maxims, and many beautiful fragments of the more ancient poems. The narrative is, indeed, meant only to serve as a vehicle for this anthology of poetical images and moral observations. The whole is admirably calculated to rouse and exercise the reflection of youth ; but it contains so much of what is repugnant to our ideas, that we cannot, in fact, be fair judges of the effect which it must produce.

The translations of Wilkins, Jones, and those who have adopted their method, are, upon the whole, extremely faithful. Of the few versions which have appeared in the French language, the most are only slight extracts ; and those which do set before us the substance of entire old Indian works, are never executed from the original language, but from translations into some of the modern Hindoo dialects, so that in the course of the double process many blunders and omissions, and not a few barbarous interpolations and additions, are to be complained of. This is particularly the case with the work called *Bagavadam*, the only one of the eighteen *Puranas* which has as yet been translated. Other works, the compositions of men who were either altogether unacquainted with the ancient language, or who were incapable of selection, contain only the substance of oral communications of the Brahmins, and extracts from older or later writings, mingled together without taste or discernment. Roger belongs to this class, and many works of the older travellers, as also the collection which has more lately been published from the papers of Polier. All the works of Mahometan authors which relate to Indian affairs must be used with great caution.

It is true that they are extremely valuable when they contain historical representations of the actual state of India, and the remarks of eyewitnesses, as, for instance, the description of India, which was executed at the command of the Emperor Akbar, in the *Ayeen Akbery*. But wherever the Mussulman authors treat of the Hindoo philosophy, whether in the way of analysis or of translation, we must be very much upon our guard. Their mode of criticism is childish; their mode of translating is coarse, blundering, and not unfrequently unintelligible; but, above all, they are utterly incapable of feeling or comprehending the true nature and import of opinions so different from their own. For these reasons one of the very worst sources of information with respect to Indian antiquity is the *Ouknekhat*; it is, indeed, almost entirely useless, and so much the more worthless because we possess many better and authentic monuments of the same sort. The quantity of materials is immense; and the Brahmins have a passion for ascribing a fabulous antiquity to all works which in any way relate to their mythology and their system; so that in truth no study requires more caution and discrimination than that of the literature of Hindostan.

In many Indian works there occur copious notices both of Alexander the Great and of Sandrocottus, who succeeded Porus as his Indian lieutenant. Of these the age is ascertained from internal evidence. In others we can perceive allusions which show them to have been written about the time of the first Mahometan conquests. But here one should be very careful not to come to a hasty decision concerning the authenticity or age of whole works, merely from meeting with particular phrases or sentences which may have been interpolated by some later hand.

The Indian works are destitute both of the advantages and the disadvantages which they might have derived from being handed down by oral tradition in the manner which has rendered us so very dubious as to the original formation of the great old works of Grecian genius. It is scarcely

possible to doubt that the oldest of these were committed to writing as soon as they were composed, for there exist in India specimens of sculptured writing whose antiquity is at least as great as that of any Indian poems now extant.

It is very remarkable that among the many Indian monuments which are decorated with sculpture (and almost their whole mythology is to be seen hewn out in rocks) there should be found no hieroglyphics. In the Phœnician alphabet, and those derived from it, (including the alphabets of the west of Asia and of Europe, which have all one common origin,) the shapes and even the names of the letters prove beyond all doubt that they were formed out of the hieroglyphics which preceded them. The Indian alphabet exhibits no such traces; nay, its construction renders it extremely improbable that it was derived from any similar origin. This is a circumstance on many accounts worthy of much attention, in particular when we reflect that by the concurrence of all historical testimonies the use of decimal ciphers had its commencement in Hindostan. That was, without all doubt, next to alphabet writing, the greatest discovery of human genius, and the honour of it remains undisputed with the Indians. If, however, the Indian works have been more fortunate than the Greek in escaping the dangers inseparable from compositions handed down for ages by recitation, they have on the other hand been so much the more exposed to the dangers of wilful falsification and additions. The more apparent these are in some works, the more are those to be prized in which we cannot detect any traces of them. The Puranas (a sort of mythological legends) contain the greatest number of suspicious circumstances. The works which are apparently most free from all defects of this kind, are those heroic poems of which I have spoken above. Perhaps of all known books there is none which carries with it more convincing proofs both of high antiquity and perfect integrity than the law-book of Menu. Whoever has any acquaintance with researches and doubts of this sort, will feel, even in reading the transla-

tion, that he has before him a genuine monument of antiquity. Sir William Jones (the greatest orientalist of the eighteenth century, and one of the most accomplished scholars to which England has ever given birth) gives it as his opinion that this book is of an age somewhere between Homer and the Twelve Tables of the Romans. I think he has supported this opinion with very convincing arguments, and I have indeed no doubt that both the book of Menu and some others might have been seen by Alexander the Great in a state not materially different from that in which we possess them.

After the code of Menu, among books valuable as guides to the knowledge of the Indian opinions, the first place belongs to that didactic poem, which has been translated by Wilkins, under the name of the Bhogovotgita. This contains an account of the modern system of Indian philosophy, a system originally of the same nature with the doctrine of that other religious sect or party which the Greeks found in India, and called, by way of distinguishing them from the Brachmans, by the name of Σαμαναίσι. It is, in truth, only an episode of one of the great heroic poems, the Mokabharot, but it is throughout philosophical, and its contents are such that it may be considered as a complete epitome of Indian mystics. It is still in great repute, and is, in fact, an abstract of the prevalent opinions of the present day. It is worthy of remark that the deities chiefly praised and exalted in this book are ones in a great measure unknown to the ancient law-book, or, at least, occupy in it a much more humble situation; there prevails, indeed, in the Bhogovotgita a very evident tendency to combat on all occasions the more ancient system, the vedas, and the whole doctrine of polytheism. Its doctrine is one of an absolute divine unity, in which all differences disappear, and into whose abyss all things are gathered. Yet whenever mention is made of mythology, the belief inculcated is that of a poetical pantheism, or unlike the New Platonic philosophy, which, although breathing the same spirit of unity,

lent itself to the cause of external polytheism, in the hope of infusing a new life into the superannuated superstitions of the Greeks. The worship of Vishnoo and Krishnoo, which is now the prevailing one in Hindostan, differs very little, so far at least as it is here described, from the religion of Budha and Fo, which was, as we know, established in Thibet and China during the first century of the Christian era, and which has been so diffused over the middle and northern countries of Asia by the preaching of the Schamans. The principal difference consists in this, that the worshippers of Vishnoo have found themselves obliged to retain the system of castes, while it has been long since entirely abolished by those of Budha. The recluses or Gymnosophists, which appeared so remarkable to the Greeks, belong to both of the two sects of Indian philosophers, and act upon principles equally acknowledged by them both. Their retirement from the world, their mode of life, altogether devoted to contemplation, even their violent penitences, cannot fail to recall our recollection very forcibly to the first Christian recluses of Egypt. But there is one great point of difference between them. That man must in a certain sense abstract himself from the world and its concerns, in order to be able to live only for himself, is a thought so natural, that upon it were founded all the systems of Grecian ethics. More enquirers than one have been very fond of observing the coincidence between the life of entire abstraction and uncitizenship recommended by some of the Greek sects, and that adopted by the Christian recluses. Not only Plato, but even Aristotle himself (the most practical of philosophers) is inclined to give to the life of retirement, and meditation devoted to internal energies, a decided preference over that of external exertion. But even if we should be disposed to admit that the individual recluse may thus be furnished with a good opportunity for cultivating his own intellect, there is no question but the whole society must be a loser by the most cultivated intellects being withdrawn from its service. The principle, that

man, in order to reach his highest perfection, must learn to give up himself and his bodily enjoyments, is one which cannot, I think, be much controverted; but that sort of living death, and that series of penances and martyrdoms which are in credit among the Indian devotees, have an evident tendency to stupify and blunt the mind, to lead us into a world of sleepy superstitions, and, above all, to nurture within us a sort of spiritual pride and vanity, which it should above all things be the object of a philosopher to avoid. According to the true spirit of Christianity, the external abstraction from the duties of citizenship ought to be connected with the highest internal activity, not only of the spirit, but of the heart, and thereby re-operate in the most beneficial manner on all the constitutions of the society which is abandoned. The whole activity of citizenship, all its duties and labours, are, after all, directed only to a few leading purposes, and confined within certain limits. There remains ever a yet wider sphere for the exercise of that restless activity by which man is tempted to struggle for every thing that is within his reach. This is afforded, for example, in the first ages of national development, by the sciences and the arts of peace. When the state is so far advanced that these are taken into the circle of active employment, there still remain the needful to be assisted, and the sorrowful to be comforted: or, if these be all removed, there remain yet higher duties, such as to prepare men for ends more exalted than any duties of citizenship, or to watch over the truth in the midst of times of moral relaxation, to guard it from the slow poison of forgetfulness, and transmit it to posterity in all its original soundness and integrity. These are the things which draw a line of essential distinction between those Christian recluses who renounce the world that they may live entirely for their higher calling, and the sluggish degradation of the indolent and self-torturing Hindoos.

But this propensity to a life of retirement and contemplation is by no means the only point of resemblance between

the Hindoos and the Christians. The Indian idea of a threefold Godhead is one, I confess, upon which I am inclined to lay very little stress. Some such division, some allusion to a threefold principle, is to be found in the religion of most peoples as well as in the systems of most philosophers. It is the universal form of being given by the first cause to all his works—the seal of the Deity, if we may so speak, stamped on all the thoughts of the mind and all the forms of nature. The Indian doctrine of a threefold principle is extremely different from ours, and, at least in the manner in which they themselves explain it, is extremely absurd; for the cause of destruction is by it supposed to form part of the highest being. That principle of evil, which, in the Persian theology, is represented as in perpetual opposition to the Godhead, is by the Indian divines united with the creating and preserving power, to make up the being of the Deity himself. God is, according to their first maxim, “all in all;” and they think that it is as much a part of his prerogative to be the cause of all the evil in the world as of all the good.

The idea of incarnation, so prevalent among the Indians, bears little resemblance to any thing in our religion, and is indeed every where overburdened with the most absurd fables. We may trace a much more solid resemblance in those ruling feelings, both of life and of poetry, to which I have already directed your attention. In all the poems and works of *our* ancients (the Greeks) we cannot but be sensible of an excessive repose: they who are best able to appreciate the beauty of their writings will agree with me in thinking that, even in those cases where the most open expression of deep feeling, morality, or conscience might have been expected, the Greek authors are apt to view the subject of which they treat as a mere external appearance of life—with a certain perfect, undisturbed, and elaborate equability. The feelings whose expression would in many cases be the most appropriate, are to them uncustomary or unknown. We may well say that repentance and hope (I



mean that higher hope which has eternity for its object) are Christian feelings. Akin to these are all feelings and sentiments which are connected with the present abject condition of our being, and a sense of the perfection from which we are fallen. But among the Indians the feeling and sympathy of guilt are above all others predominant. I have already mentioned, that according to their descriptions of a moral transgression, it is something of which all nature is conscious—an outrage against the universe. The solitary voice in the heart, for such is the name by which conscience is called, opens to us a new sense, an ear, as it were, by which we gain acquaintance with the affairs of a world which would otherwise be entirely imperceptible to us. But this voice is but too often drowned in the noise and tumult of the world, and in order to have its suggestions brought with more power before our minds, we require to observe the effects which the same offences that call down its reproaches produce on the feelings of those around us. On such ideas and such feelings as these, not only has the Indian imagination explained all the outward appearances of life, the whole of nature assumes a similar form. In every thing that surrounds him the Indian sees beings endowed with a nature and feelings like his own, suffering like himself under the burden of former transgressions, enclosed like him in some temporary form of unworthiness, but still capable like him of all the tenderness of recollection and all the consolateness of foresight. He is united with all nature by the ties of brotherhood, and has his ears open on every side to the voice of compassion. The general system under which he believes the world to be governed, is one of so much harshness, that, to make it tolerable, he stands in much need of all the alleviations which can be afforded him by the balsam of love, and his faith in the presence of this all-animating sympathy.

But the most remarkable point of resemblance between the Indian and the Christian doctrines lies in the absolute identity of conception with which both describe the process

of regeneration. In the Indian creed, exactly as in our own, so soon as the soul becomes touched with the love of divine things, it is supposed to drop at once its life contaminated by sin, and, as the phoenix rises from its ashes, to spring at once into the possession of a new and purified existence. So universal is the prevalence of this idea among the Indians, that the soul so purified is said by the Brahmins (with the same words and the same meaning familiar to ourselves,) to be *New-born*. But even here there is ample room to perceive the superiority of our Christian religion. That religion has, indeed, no more than either reason or nature, opposed at any time the hereditary advantages of earthly possession; the idea of any such social equality has been confined to a few doting and ignorant enthusiasts. But, on the other hand, Christianity acknowledges, distinctly and broadly, the principle that all men are equal before God; a principle much better calculated than the other to nourish within us the noble spirit of freedom. In the Christian system, all heavenly possessions are the free gift of heaven, and they are often conferred on those whom we should be apt to consider as the most mean and the most unworthy. In the religion of the Hindoos, those blessings which ought to form the common hope of all men, are represented as the peculiar privilege of certain castes. What encouragement for pride on the one hand! what sources of self-despising thoughts and voluntary degradations on the other!

In spite of all these errors, and all this palpable inferiority in the Hindoo system, the resemblance between it and the Christian is nevertheless sufficiently distinct to have given rise among certain critics to the idea that the Brahmins have borrowed many of their opinions from our gospels. I think, however, that the prevalence of such notions in India, at a period much more early than this, is proved beyond a doubt by historical evidence. Besides, I am not of the opinion that we ought to be so much startled by the discovery of any such imperfect anticipation of the truth. We might, with equal reason, take it for granted, whenever we

meet in the writings of the other Asiatic nations any thing which bears a strong resemblance to the traditions of Moses, or the allegories of Solomon, that the authors of these writings must, of necessity, have had in their hands copies of our Old Testament exactly like ourselves. Although the stream may be both distant and impure, it may still retain something of the nature of its original fountain. The seeds of all truth and all virtue are implanted by nature in man—the image of God. He has often indistinct surmises of things which are not till long afterwards to be perfectly revealed. The first fathers of Christianity found in the life of Socrates and the doctrines of Plato so much that harmonized with their own system, that they scrupled not to say these philosophers were both, in some measure, Christians. As all the manifestations of nature are connected with each other by the common principle of being, and as all exercise of reason must give birth to somewhat similar results, so also, in a higher region, all those truths which relate to divine things are mysteriously kindred to each other. When one step is given, man easily goes further. It is only necessary that the first spark of light should be given from above; *that* man can no more strike out for himself than he can create for himself a new body or a new soul. It is true that there are many thoughts, many trains and worlds of thought, which are originated by man himself; but these thoughts are mere emanations of selfishness, narrow and unprofitable, and tending to no issue. We can no more say that truth and light are in these, than that pure morality consists in pride and vanity.

The great picture of the development of the human mind, and the history of truth and errors, is becoming more perfect in proportion as we are becoming acquainted with a greater number of nations possessing systems and mythologies of their own. Things which in the western world appear always at a great distance from each other, are often found in the most intimate union among the remote nations of Asia. While the Persians bear, in every thing

which respects religious belief, a nearer resemblance to the Hebrews than to any other people, the poetical part of their mythology is extremely similar to the northern theology, and their manners have many points of coincidence with those of the Germans. Among the Indians, again, we find a mythology resembling partly that of the Egyptians, partly that of the Greeks, and yet comprehending in it many ideas, both moral and philosophical, which, in spite of all differences in detail, are evidently akin to the doctrines of our Christian religion. There is, indeed, no reason to doubt that there existed a reciprocal communication of ideas between India and those countries which had the nearest access to the ancient revelation. The Persians had, without doubt, obtained the mastery over Northern India before the days of Alexander; or, at least, they had from time to time overrun and conquered it. And Persian ideas and doctrines might very easily be circulated in India; for although they differed greatly in institutions and opinions, the two nations were originally connected, both by language and descent. Even the expedition of Alexander, although the authority it established was of no long duration, may have left a very considerable impression on the minds of the Indians. As in the Grecian opinions and mythology much more is of foreign origin than one would at first be inclined to believe, in consequence of the art with which the Greeks rendered every thing which they borrowed from other nations Greek; even so there may be much in the sacred books of the Brahmins originally derived from the opinions of foreign nations. The very uniformity and bigotry of Indian thought must have soon lent an Indian air to whatever was ingrafted on it, and may thus have been productive of the same effects as the restlessness and variety of Grecian intellect. Although India received, perhaps, in the more early periods, no return from Egypt for the knowledge which she communicated, the case may have been very different afterwards, and the Indians may have derived some notions of the doctrines of Judaism and Christianity through their in-

tercourse with the Egyptians. I have, indeed, little doubt that the later writers of Hindostan have had the benefit of some such communication. The first diffusion of Christianity on the coast of Malabar is supposed to have taken place so early as the age of the apostles. We have, besides, historical evidence of a Christian mission having been sent from Egypt into India about the end of the fourth, or beginning of the fifth century. At that period India was also connected in the way of trade with Ethiopia. While Armenia, Syria, Egypt, and Ethiopia, remained entirely Christian, and either in subjection to the Byzantine empire, or on terms of friendly alliance with it, the intercourse between the remoter east and the west, by way of Constantinople, must have been extremely easy. The last writer who describes the Indians of the sixteenth century as an eyewitness, says expressly that he found their seas and havens filled with Persian vessels. The power of the Persians was very predominant by land also previous to the appearance of Mahomet: they had already considerably reduced the extent of the eastern empire. In consequence of Egypt and Syria being taken away from the Byzantine empire by the successors of Mahomet, the old intercourse between the east and the west was for a time interrupted; but it was restored with great success by the operations of the Crusades.

The epoch in which the different opinions of the Asiatics began to be introduced and opposed to each other among the Europeans, was that which takes in the period between Hadrian and Justinian. But even in the earliest times of Christianity, the influence of these oriental systems was sufficiently apparent. The mystical sects of the first century consisted, in a great measure, of persons who had embraced different dogmas of the oriental philosophers, and who endeavoured to blend these, as well as the fictions of altogether inconsistent mythologies, with the doctrines of the new faith. Even the greatest of the first Christian philosophers, Origen, was a believer in the transmigration

of souls, and many other oriental opinions altogether irreconcilable with Christianity. In the New Platonic philosophy, which undertook the defence of the old Polytheism, and was professedly hostile to Christianity, the Egyptian taste made daily steps to predominance. This philosophy was a strange, chaotic, and fermenting mixture of astrology, metaphysics, and mythology. The propensity to secret and magical arts—whose mysteries were frequently sinful as well as foolish—grew daily more and more into a passion. Such was the philosophy, and such the opinions which it was the ambition of the Emperor Julian to establish on the ruins of Christianity. The more Christianity increased, the more universal and comprehensive must the struggle between it and the old religion have become. The antipathy natural to contending parties yields an easy explanation of the early persecutions of Christianity. It is not possible to doubt that Diocletian had a regular plan in view, and was resolved, at all hazards, to extirpate our religion. But the cause of truth was strong, and its strength became sufficiently manifested in the time of Constantine. The victory which the new religion then gained was, however, not so much due to the exertions of that prince, as to the same internal strength which had been the protector of Christianity during all the assaults of Diocletian. The establishment of Christianity has, however, been numbered among the merits of Constantine; and it is no wonder that the fame of such a service has induced posterity to throw a merciful veil over all his faults. But the genius of the old religion was not yet entirely overthrown, and the contest was once more renewed, and that with redoubled spirit, under Julian. This was a prince, whatever his other qualities might be, of very splendid talents; he attacked Christianity, not by open force, like Diocletian, (which was, indeed, by this time, out of the question,) but with ridicule, and all manner of traitorous arts and reproaches. His most insidious attempt was to render Christianity contemptible, by representing it as a system incompatible with all higher intellectual accom-

plishment and education. The modern panegyrists of Julian have many points of resemblance to the subject of their eulogies; but if they would condescend to examine a little more closely into the true nature of that scientific superstition to which Julian was attached, perhaps they might see less reason to identify their own cause with his.

Even after Christianity had outstood this last regular attack upon her existence, she had still to contend with a strong opposition from the philosophers, down to the time of Justinian. That prince banished the philosophers, who were her principal enemies, from his dominions. They took refuge in Persia, where they soon became dispersed and forgotten; and so terminated the remarkable contest between the heathen philosophy and the Christian religion.

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## LECTURE VI.

INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE ROMAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE—TRANSITION TO THE NORTHERN NATIONS — GOTHIC HEROIC POEMS — ODIN, RUNIC WRITINGS AND THE EDDA—OLD GERMAN POETRY—THE NIBELUNGEN-LIED.

I HAVE now attempted to give you a view of three periods—of literature. In setting before you the two first of these,—the flourishing era of Greek intellect, from Solon to the Ptolemies, and the best and properly classical time of Roman literature, from Cicero to Trajan,—I had an easy task to perform. For by merely passing in review, and pointing out the characteristic qualities of the individual writers, I did all that was necessary in order to give you a distinct idea of the spirit and progressive character of the whole subject—of the various and intermingled revolutions of progress and decline by which the literary history of some remarkable centuries was distinguished.



The case was very different with regard to the third period—between Hadrian and Justinian. The object here was not to describe the forms of particular compositions, and the merits of individual authors, but to set before you a view of progressive changes in general thought. My purpose was to display the great struggle between the world of antiquity and the new Christian faith ; the influence which was produced by the introduction of a new religion from Asia into Europe ; the fermentation which was produced, both among Greeks and Romans, by the influx of oriental dogmas and oriental mysticism. My task was here a much more difficult one. In order to describe this conflict of Asiatic opinions, and the whole picture of Asiatic traditions, I was compelled to speak of nations whose literature has altogether perished, such as the Egyptians ; of others, whose ancient literature is known to us only by the imperfect productions of after ages, such as the Persians ; of the Hebrews, whose sacred writings contain, indeed, all the old literature and poetry of the nation, but are viewed by us in a manner little adapted for exact criticism, impressed as we are with habitual reverence for what we conceive to be the repositories of divine communication ; last of all, of the Indians, whose literature is rich and various, but known to us imperfectly, and from sources often of very dubious authority.

Even in the greater proportion of authors (both heathens and Christians) which were produced by Greece and Rome in the time between Hadrian and Justinian, the principal object of attention is not the form of composition, but the spirit, and import, and development of opinion. Should any one attempt to depict this period by going regularly through the catalogue of its writers, and assigning to the compositions of each their due share of critical blame or approbation ; the consequence would only be, that our ideas would be bewildered, and we should entirely lose sight of the main object of importance. It is true that all manner of literary information and literary facilities were extensively diffused during this period ; perhaps the spirit of inquiry and

the love of investigation were never so common or so lively as at this very time, which was, above all others, the most fruitful in the production of all sorts of errors and superstitions. If we look to the universal activity of intellect, the wide diffusion of knowledge, errors, traditions, and erudition of all kinds, we cannot hesitate to consider this age as, in a mere literary point of view, one of the most accomplished and remarkable that the world has ever seen. But our conclusion would be very different if we should direct our attention only to the character and original genius of its individual great authors, and their skill and taste in language, style, and composition. In poetry, to which, among all the departments of literature, the first place is ever due, during the whole of this period nothing really new or great was produced. It produced, indeed, great masters of eloquence, for that was a talent of which the Greeks were never destitute; but what is there either in the form or art of their rhetoric that is either new or remarkable? The highest praise to which the best orators of this time can lay claim is, that their style and language are still such as to recall to our recollection, or even to sustain a comparison with, the better ages of antiquity. The Greek language was, indeed, still preserved in great purity and perfection. To some of the great Christian orators, such as Basil and Chrysostom, we must, however, allow the further praise of having directed that rhetoric, which was natural to them as Greeks, not to sophistical topics, which was the chief error of their predecessors, but to the development of the most sacred truth and the purest morality. But, in truth, the ambition of writing well was no characteristic of this age. The Christian fathers had other things in view than to shine as authors, and the same thing may be said of their heathen opponents. How can any one talk of Plotinus or Porphyry, or even of Longinus, as writers, after having read Plato? and yet these are the very men whose writings merit our chief attention, since their opinions exerted the greatest influence both on their contemporaries and on posterity. In general, individual

distinctions were lost sight of in the overpowering bustle and conflict of the age. There are in the history of literature, epochs wherein all the praise, both of style and intellect, belong to the genius of individuals who had outstripped their generation; there are others in which individuals go for nothing, and all our attention is riveted on the great motions of the common mind. The historian of literature must be impartial, and represent with equal fidelity all the modes of intellectual manifestations; he must give due space both to the repose of artificial development on the one hand, and the creativeness of chaotic ferment on the other.

If we regard only the intellectual strength which was ranged on either side in this great contest, we shall find that the powers of the two parties, both in talents and in erudition, were pretty fairly matched. With perhaps some few exceptions, every incident of the conflict was produced by the merits of the two causes, not the excellencies or defects of the individual combatants. Among the Greeks, at the beginning of this period, the heathenish party had certainly the advantage; the Greek literature had its last fine season at a time when the Christians under Antoninus scarcely ventured to bring forward a single writing in defence either of their persecuted faith or their calumniated lives. Even among the Christian party, the Greeks still maintained their reputation of superior intellectual attainments; the first philosophical and learned apologists, the first great orators and historians of Christianity, were all Greeks. The superiority both in talents and learning began every day to be more and more on the side of the Christians. But even after the new religion had acquired a complete victory and become the established faith of the empire, among the Greeks at least, the heathen party were still distinguished by the most commanding talents. Even those last philosophers who opposed Christianity, and attempted to restore heathenism after it had fairly been abolished, were men who are, when considered in relation to the time which produced them, worthy of very high admi-

ration, whether we regard the profoundness of their views, the extent of their learning, or even the elegance of their compositions.

In the west the case was very different. There we have only a very few heathen writers, and these ones of no great importance, opposed to a whole body of Christian literature in Latin. It is true that this western literature is not worthy of being compared, either in respect of talents or erudition, with the Christian literature of the Greeks. The Romans had, indeed, at no time, any great talents for philosophy and metaphysics; even their language was against them, and its defects are no less visible in Augustine than in Cicero. It was not till long after the Latin had become a dead language that it was moulded, by the violence of foreigners, into a state capable of expressing, in some degree, (however imperfectly,) the subtleties of those born dialecticians and metaphysicians, the Greeks. The greatest and most original work which the later Latin literature produced, is unquestionably that in which St Augustine has attempted to give a Christian interpretation to the greatest work of ancient philosophy—the Republic of Plato, and the ideal system of man and society which it contains. But even this work, although it professes to be chiefly occupied with matters of the most abstract nature, such as the destiny of man and the ideas of social arrangement, is in truth not so much a metaphysical as a moral work. It is, however, a moral work in the most extensive sense of that word; for it contains many admirable criticisms on the work of Plato, a theory of human life, and an abstract of the philosophy of history. Even in the Christian age, the national distinctions of Greeks and Romans were still kept alive; and if the former were remarkable for skill and subtilty, the latter were no less so for practical intellect and soundness of understanding. These qualities of the Roman mind, embodied as they were in that admirable system of laws which was preserved all over the Roman west, among the learned and the clergy, are entitled, more than any

others to our gratitude. It is to the influence of the Roman jurisprudence, united with the spirit of freedom and natural feeling introduced by those German tribes which conquered and restored the Roman empire, that we must ascribe the successful development and dignified attitude of modern intellect.

Christianity (as given to the Teutonic nations by the Romans) on the one hand, and the free spirit of the north on the other, are the two elements from which the new world proceeded, and the literature of the middle ages remained, accordingly, at all times, a double literature. One literature, Christian and Latin, was common to the whole of Europe, and had for its sole object the preservation and extension of knowledge: but there was another and a more peculiar literature for each particular nation in its vernacular tongue. The first great patrons of modern literature—Theodorick the Goth, Charlemagne, and Alfred—had, accordingly, in all their labours a twofold object; the one, to preserve undiminished, and to render more generally useful, that inheritance of knowledge which had been transmitted down in the Latin language; the other, to improve the vernacular tongue, and thereby the national spirit—to preserve the poetical monuments; but above all, to give a regular form to the dialects of the north, and render them capable of being used in subjects of science. The poetical, creative, and national part of the literature of the middle age, is, indeed, for us both the most useful and the most pleasing; but the Latin part must by no means be passed over in silence, for it is the only bond by which modern Europe is connected with the whole of classical as well as Christian antiquity.

The last incidents in the history of the yet living Latin language, which had so great an influence on the development and peculiar character of the Romanic dialects, its offspring, and in general on the poetical spirit of the middle ages, were the following:—With the translation of the Bible into the Roman language, there commenced an

altogether new period—a late, and in many respects a rich, after-harvest of Latin literature. From the close of the old classical period under Trajan, till the age of Christian writers in the fourth and fifth centuries, we find an almost total pause; scarcely here and there a single work in the Roman language, and even these ones of very little importance. That better and more important works of that period have perished, we have no reason to suspect. The Greeks had at this time a visible superiority. If, in the centuries which I have mentioned, there arose, not only among the Christian party, but also among their opponents, several better writers, both in poetry and in history, perhaps we must ascribe the honour of these to the great stirring of intellect which then took place, and the revolution introduced into both language and literature by the new religion, and the zealous warmth of its defenders. Thus once more did the Roman intellect owe a period of intellectual and literary exertion, not to its own unassisted efforts, but the influence of causes altogether foreign and external. The imitation of oriental models became now the moving principle of Roman writers, as the imitation of Greek models had been the moving principle of their predecessors. In one point of view, perhaps, this was by no means an unfortunate change; at all events the copying of Greek poetry and eloquence was, in the classical age itself, a work of labour and imperfection, and could not have been restored with any prospect of success. That elegant and periodic mode of composing prose, which seems to have been quite natural to the Greeks, remained at all times foreign to the structure of the Roman language. A few, indeed, of the most eminent Roman authors mastered this difficulty, and attained to a noble and simple mode of composition; but all the rest, even those who are entitled to be called excellent writers, struggled unsuccessfully with the foreign form, and, vainly attempting a too close imitation of the Greeks, lost and bewildered themselves in an inextricable labyrinth of overloaded periods. The Roman poets in

like manner, when they venture to assume the rich and ornamental clothing of the Grecian muse, can very seldom get rid of an air of pedantic constraint and obscurity. Even the Greek versification which they adopted (with the exception of the hexameter alone, and perhaps the elegiac measure) never became thoroughly familiar to Italian ears. The elaborate system of quantities seems to have been quite beyond the reach of the common people, and this may perhaps be one reason why Horace, a writer of whom the moderns are so fond, was far from being equally felt and admired by his countrymen, even of the times immediately succeeding his own. A great part of his harmony was altogether unintelligible to the Roman people.

The Roman language, although in the end it became extremely polished, and attained, in subjects connected with law, with warlike affairs, and with the useful arts, a richness, and at the same time a precision to which no other can lay claim, had nevertheless at all times two great wants—the want of ease in prose, and the want of boldness in poetry. In both of these respects it might have received great improvement, and probably, but for some unfortunate obstacles, it would have done so, from the revolution which was now taking place. Any great improvement was indeed impossible without the operation of some such violent cause, for such a cause alone could bring about a complete desertion of the old manner of writing; and so long as that was adhered to, to get rid of the old defects was evidently quite impossible. The knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures was, above all things, calculated to answer these purposes, for in them the greatest sublimity of poetical thought is ever united with the most unaffected simplicity of expression. To show what might have been produced by the study of those matchless writings, I shall only direct your attention for a single moment to the common version of the Psalms,\* which is, in fact, part of the first translation, commonly

\* In the Vulgate.



called the Italick. I appeal to the feelings of every man who can feel and appreciate the high dignity and noble strength of the Roman language, whether these do not appear to be completely revived in this incomparable version. I am almost tempted to doubt whether the whole circle of Roman literature can show a single imitation of Greek poetry so eminently happy as this translation of the sacred songs of the Hebrews ; wherein the utmost elevation of sentiment is throughout accompanied with the most chastened simplicity of style. Even in regard to musical sound, the superiority of the Roman language is here so conspicuous, that in our own days the great composers of the higher music still give the preference to the old language, over its harmonious daughter the Italian. The true reason why the Roman language derived no lasting improvement from any of these things, was this—that even before the conquests of the German tribes it had begun to be radically corrupted by the influence of the provincials. In proportion to the decline of her political power, Rome, already the centre of all ecclesiastical influence, began to make every day more and more rapid approaches towards a complete supremacy in all matters of intellect and taste. But the effect of this upon her own literature was far from being good. Even so early as the days of the first Cæsars, it was the opinion of many, that there were some defects in the Latinity of those Roman writers who were natives of Spain—that they wrote with the air of men speaking a foreign language ; and, indeed, many modern critics have thought they could trace no inconsiderable resemblance between the antithesis of Seneca and the bombast of Lucan, and some prevailing errors in taste among the modern Spanish writers. But how much more common must these provincialisms have become in the age of which we are now treating ; an age wherein the greater part of the Latin writers, and, indeed, almost all the first Latin fathers, were natives either of Africa or of Gaul. It is scarcely to be doubted, that in the many far dispersed provinces of the empire, several distinct Roman dialects

were long before this time formed. Even in Italy there is every reason to believe that the language of the common people differed materially from that of which the Roman writers made use, and which was spoken in the metropolis. It is to this Romanic dialect of the common people—the *Lingua Rustica*, as it was called—that the modern Italian grammarians are fond of ascribing the origin of their own language, rather than to the change wrought on the proper Latin tongue by the invasion of the northern tribes. In the mean time, as Rome had been originally not only the fountain, but, perhaps, the only seat of pure speaking, so the language remained much longer pure in her than in any other part of the empire. The most eloquent and powerful writer among the Latin fathers—St Jerome—was not, indeed, a native of Rome, but he had at least received all his education there. And however inferior the language of the fifth century must of necessity be to that of Cicero, yet in Jerome we see much both of the true strength of old Latinity, and the unequivocal elegance of classical cultivation. The change upon the Latin language must have been great indeed, when, in consequence of the prodigious influx of Goths into Italy, and of many of these settling in Rome itself, the language began to be spoken and written by a great population to which it was altogether foreign. Although no absolute mixture of the languages as yet took place, yet it is certain that the Latin underwent at least such an alteration as rendered it a matter of labour and exertion for the Romans themselves to preserve in their speech any share of that purity which was formerly natural to them.

This, indeed, begins to form a characteristic feature in all the Roman writers of the age of the Gothic king Theodorick. With him antiquity ends, and all the writers after his time may be said to belong to the middle age.

However favourable its consequences may have afterwards been, there is no doubt that the first introduction of Christianity must, like every other great revolution, have pro-

duced a temporary interruption in all art and all literature. Perhaps of all the fine arts, that which suffered the least was architecture, for the new religion not only adopted the finest old buildings for its own purposes, but suggested the idea of new buildings which could have had no existence under the former system, or among any people ignorant of the peculiar character and sublimity of the Christian worship. In the same manner that the Greeks had of old formed a truly Grecian architecture out of the elements furnished to them by the Egyptians and other nations, the Christians now made use of the beautiful forms of the Grecian architecture, and formed out of them a new style, which was purely and originally a Christian architecture. How soon this took place may be learned from the admirable church of St Sophia in Constantinople, which was built in the time of Justinian by Anthemius, himself not only a great practical architect, but also a great and scientific writer upon the theory of his art. The absurdity of calling all the Teutonic architecture of the middle ages by the name *Gothic*, has been often remarked; but there is no doubt, that during the period of their empire in Italy, the Goths erected many buildings, which still survive as specimens of their architectural skill. The fate of the ancient music was in like manner fortunate; its most simple and noble species were at once adopted into the service of the Christian church, and we still listen to many ancient Roman airs, adapted to the service of hymns and psalms, and invested with a more solemn and ethereal harmony by the majestic accompaniments of the organ. The interruption in sculpture was much greater. The images of the ancient gods, so long as they were considered as such, and not viewed merely as specimens of art, were objects of unmingled aversion to the early Christians. The representations of our Saviour and the Virgin, which soon became common among them, were not intended to serve any other purpose than the excitement of pious reflections. They afforded very little scope either for sculpture or painting when treated in this way, and to make

use of them as vehicles for the expression of beauty, whether in form or sentiment, was the thought of a period as yet far distant. But yet greater than this, and, indeed, far greater than any other, must have been the interruption which took place in poetry. Some few, indeed, still persisted in making a poetical use of the old pagan mythology; but as all the particulars of that system had already been completely exhausted, and the belief itself was utterly gone, nothing more was attainable than a faint and elaborate imitation of the matchless works of the true pagans. The attempt to form a new and properly Christian poetry was, indeed, extremely successful in the department of hymns and songs, for in these the warm expression of feeling was alone sufficient to constitute excellence; and, besides, the Christian writers had this advantage, that they were almost compelled to follow the example of the very best models they could have had—the Psalms of the Hebrews. But the more ambitious attempts to describe in poetry the whole system of Christianity, were in general, as has very frequently been the case in modern times, altogether unsuccessful; the form of composition borrowed from the ancient poets was little adapted for such subjects, and the result was only a collection of uninteresting centos, possessing, indeed, the attributes of metrical arrangement and elevated language, but utterly destitute of all that life and spirit in which the essence of poetry consists. For these Europe had to look to her other fountain of inspiration, the north.

In the very earliest Roman accounts of the German nations we find many notices of their extraordinary love for poetry. The songs in which the actions of Hermann\* were celebrated have perished; so also have those inspiring strains with which the prophetess Valeda was wont to animate the courage of the Teutonic Batavi, when they, after long following the Roman banners against their brethren of Germany, undertook at last to maintain a war in defence of

\* Arminius.

their own freedom ; and found too late, by sad experience, that the time for resistance had gone by. The mythological poems of these northern nations must naturally have been forgotten after the adoption of a new religion. But the most essential part, the spirit and strength of their poetry, was kept alive in the historical heroic poems. These, in process of time, came to be composed with greater elegance of language and versification, to be softened by the refinement of manners, and to be beautified and ennobled by the spirit of love and thoughtfulness. And such was the origin of that chivalrous poetry which is (in this shape at least) altogether peculiar to Christian Europe, and has produced effects so powerful on the national spirit of its noblest inhabitants.

Of the Teutonic nations converted to Christianity, the Goths were the first who possessed historical heroic poems of the kind to which I have alluded. Gothic heroic poems were already sung in the time of Attila, and they continued to form the amusement of the court of King Theodorick. Even the Latin writers of that age make mention of them ; and some of them have transmitted to us, as true history in prose, particulars relating to the antiquities of the northern tribes, which were in fact only the poetical ornaments of these heroic legends. The fame of the royal line of the Amali, and all the heroes of that race, seems to have been the favourite subject of these poems. In the sequel, both Attila and Theodorick, and after them Charlemagne himself, were honoured with a similar celebration.

Of Gothic literature we still possess one monument, the Bible of Ulphilas ; and it is evident from it that the Gothic language had at least made very close approximations to a regular construction. This version of the sacred writings was originally executed for the use of those Gothic tribes which occupied the countries on the Danube ; but we have the clearest evidence, that the very same dialect was spoken by the Goths in Italy. It is expressly stated that Theodoc k favoured impartially the progress of both literatures, the

Latin and the Gothic. We know, indeed, that he encouraged the translating of Latin books into Gothic, exactly as the great Alfred, somewhat later, did that of the same books into Anglo-Saxon. From the manner in which the Latin historian Jornandes acknowledges his obligations to the heroic poems of the Goths, there is great reason to believe that he, or rather the authors whom he transcribed, had not barely heard these poems recited, but seen them committed to writing at the court of Theodorick. And this is rendered the more probable by the circumstance of these poems having been, so far as we can judge, principally occupied with the achievements of the royal race of the Amali. A prince like Theodorick would neglect no means to secure the preservation of such interesting records. But with the disappearance of the Gothic nation, its language also, and all the monuments of its greatness, passed away. These were, indeed, preserved in some measure among the Spaniards after they had elsewhere been forgotten, for it was the ambition of the Spanish monarchs to trace their lineage to the old Gothic kings. But in Italy, on the contrary, every Gothic monument seems to have been studiously destroyed; for there the vanity of the great families took a different turn, and they were willing to sacrifice all the proofs of a true Gothic or Longobardic pedigree, for the sake of fabricating a descent from some of the patricians of ancient Rome.

If we reflect on the nature of the prevalent tastes of that age, we shall, I think, have no difficulty in concluding that those songs of the German bards, which Charlemagne caused to be collected and committed to writing, could scarcely have been any thing else than similar heroic poems relating to the first Christian period, and the great expeditions of the northern tribes. He was to the German bards what Solon was to Homer or the Homeridæ. Now we have still extant heroic poems in the German language, wherein Attila, Odoacer, Theodorick, and the race of the Amali, are celebrated, in conjunction with many heroes, both Frankish and Burgundian, all mingled together without scruple by the

bold anachronisms of a most uncritical age. The present shape in which these poems appear, bears indeed the clearest marks of an age long posterior to that of Charlemagne. But perhaps it is not too much to say, that we have still in our possession, if not the language or form, at least the substance of many of those ancient poems which were collected by the orders of that prince; I refer to the *Nibelungen-lied*,\* and the collection which goes by the name of the *Heldenbuch*.†

The opinion that the poems collected together by Charlemagne referred to Hermann or Odin, or in general to the Pagan antiquities and mythology of the old Germans, can, I apprehend, be entertained only by those who have not looked with sufficient accuracy into the spirit of that age. I shall bring forward a single historical evidence, which may, I think, greatly contribute to put an end to the dispute. This is the still extant formula of that oath by which the Saxons renounced heathenism on their conversion to Christianity. Its words are as follows:—"I renounce all the works and words of the Devil, Thunaer, (that is, the god of thunder, or Thor,) and Wodan, and Saxon Odin, and all the unholy that are their kindred." This formula is, indeed, commonly ascribed to the eighth century, rather before the time of Charlemagne; but that is of no importance, it is quite sufficient evidence of the spirit of those days. Odin was still worshipped in Saxony in the age of Charlemagne, and sacrifices were offered to him on the Hartz that he might assist the Saxon armies in their wars with Charlemagne himself. How, then, can we believe that, in such a state of things, Charlemagne would make collections of heathenish poetry in praise of Hermann or Odin? From the same oath another historical truth of great importance may also be gathered, and that is—that Odin was a person altogether distinct from Wodan, having Saxony expressly mentioned as his native land. Even the legends and histories of Scandinavia, although they might very easily have appropriated Odin entirely to themselves, are yet uniform and consistent

\* Lay of the Nibelungen.

† Book of Heroes.



in relating that he was at first king in Saxony, and came from thence to Sweden, where he built Sigtuna and established his great empire. The testimony of the Anglo-Saxons is strongly in favour of the same account, and their testimony is of very considerable weight, for their kings (and among the rest Alfred) traced their genealogy in the right line to Odin. This Anglo-Saxon genealogy is supported by so many historical proofs, and the effect of the coinciding testimonies of these two distant nations is on my mind so strong, that I have little hesitation in adopting the opinion of those who consider Odin as a historical personage. I agree with them in thinking it extremely probable that he lived about the third century of our era—a time in which the Romans, too weak to make attacks, and yet too formidable to be invaded, had perhaps fewer means of knowing what passed in the north of Germany than at any other period, either before or afterwards. It is, I think, in these facts that we must seek for the reason why the name of Odin, so pre-eminently illustrious among the Saxons and the Scandinavians, remained comparatively unknown, not only to the Romans, but to all the nations of the west. I imagine that we must consider Odin as belonging to the same class with many deities of the classical mythology. He was, I doubt not, a prince, a conqueror, a hero, and at the same time a poet ; he was the author of prophetic songs, by means of which he, in conjunction with priests, seers, and other poets, his coadjutors, introduced great changes into the theology of his countrymen ; if he did not create a new system, he at least formed a new epoch in the old ; and, as he had made pretensions during his life to supernatural powers and attainments, it was quite in the common course of things that he should be deified after his death. That Odin had originally come into Saxony out of Asia, is a Scandinavian legend, or rather fancy, altogether irreconcilable with this account of the historical Odin. The Scandinavian collectors themselves were satisfied that they could not possibly reconcile their legend with historical truth, and

they accordingly had recourse to the story of another Odin, although they, indeed, very often confounded the two together. If I am not deceived, however, I think we may find some traces of this elder Odin in an ancient writer who is in all instances worthy of the greatest attention. Tacitus mentions, in the beginning of his treatise on the manners of the Germans, the existence of a legend—according to which Ulysses came in the course of his wanderings into Germany, and there founded the city of Asciburgum. Now, the ancients were accustomed to consider legends such as this in a point of view of which we have no notion. They considered nothing in such traditions but the universal idea of a deity or a hero. They called the god of war of every nation by the name of Mars, and every deity presiding over science or art by that of Mercury, and if they did not altogether overlook local differences, they at least attached to them very little importance. Ulysses was the common idea of a wandering hero, and to him and to his son, even in the remotest regions of the west, cities, and colonies, and all manner of adventures were ascribed. Wherever they met with any legend concerning a wandering hero, whether of the western or of the northern nations, their Hercules or Ulysses was always at hand, and in the history of one or other of them the foreign tradition was forthwith accommodated with a niche. The recollection of their origin, and first egress from Asia, had not entirely perished among the tribes of the north. Some legend of this kind, of a hero wandering out of distant lands into Germany, must have been repeated to Tacitus; and if the name was that of the elder Odin, it could scarcely fail to recall to the ears of the Roman that of the Greek *Odysseus*, and so to impress on his mind a yet stronger belief in the coincidence which he had remarked.

These historical songs and heroic poems were not, certainly, in the older times, (unless by the positive command of some prince) ever committed to writing: that was totally contrary, both to the spirit of such compositions, and the customs of those who recited them. I suppose they were

still left entirely to oral tradition, even after the Germans had been long connected with the Romans, and lived in society with them in many different countries, and been put in complete possession, both of alphabets and all the materials of writing. This, however, was probably by no means the case in respect of those prophetic songs of which the theology of Odin had such need—and such abundance. In these I have little doubt that letters were employed. In another work I have already taken occasion to express my opinions that the German nation were not altogether unacquainted with the use of letters, even in times preceding their knowledge of the Greek and Roman alphabets. The Runic alphabet, at least as we now have it, is indeed of a much more recent date; several of its letters are exactly copied from the Roman; but, then, others of them are entirely different, and cannot be accounted for by any corruption of formation. The peculiar arrangement of the letters, and even the defectiveness of this alphabet, (for, originally, it contained only sixteen letters,) seem to me sufficient proofs that it was an original alphabet, not one borrowed from the Romans. Even in the infinitely more perfect alphabets afterwards used by the Goths and the Anglo-Saxons, although these are in general evidently borrowed from the Greeks or the Romans, there still are to be found traces of the old Runic alphabet. For that this was an alphabet common to many at least of the German nations, is evident from the abundance of Runic inscriptions which have been discovered in all the countries formerly occupied either by Goths or Germans. Where, then, it may be asked, was the Runic alphabet learned, if not from the Greeks and Romans? If it is absolutely necessary to find a foreign origin for it, I think there can be no great difficulty in discovering one which has at least probability on its side. The Phœnicians, from whom so many other nations derived their alphabets, were for many ages in the undisputed possession of the traffic of the Baltic. We have historical evidence in our hands that several of those German nations which inhabited the

countries on the Baltic, were infinitely more advanced in cultivation than the more warlike tribes which occupied the Roman frontier, and the borders of the Rhine. Here also, by the Baltic Sea, was the original seat of that worship of Hertha, which is represented by Tacitus to have consisted in a species of mysteries. Perhaps the Runic characters were connected with this worship, and entirely appropriated to the superstitious purposes of its priests. That they were at least employed in magical ceremonies, is so certain, that I need not occupy your time in proving it. The wooden characters were probably arranged in some mysterious order, so as to answer the purpose of a rubric to the prophetic or devoting song which was muttered over them. The greater characters seem to have been again and again repeated in some method which we cannot explain, but which, certainly, was not without its meaning. The form in which we find the Runic letters inscribed on stones, affords, in my opinion, indubitable proof that they were at least sometimes applied to such purposes as these. It is not easy, indeed, for those who are at home only in the world of civilisation and refinement to enter into the spirit of those barbarous observances. For my part, I have little difficulty in conceiving that the methods adopted by these northern priests were the very best they could have chosen in order to magnify the importance of their own attainments, and impress the minds of their pupils, or of the multitude, with a due sense of mystery and awe. But it is in our times by no means uncommon to see the same men mistaking fiction for history, and history for fiction.

In Saxony itself, after its submission to the yoke of Charlemagne, the theology of Odin became very soon rooted out. But even in much later times there remained many traces of its superstitions. The country people would not part with their *festival of Spring*, and that most innocent, most natural, and most universal of all holidays, was still hallowed with due observance at the opening of the May.

Many usages of the same kind were preserved among the Christian services of the Pentecost. Even at the present day, in many of the northern districts of Germany, at that season of the year when the day is longest, great fires are kindled by night upon the mountains: a custom whose meaning has long since been forgotten, but which is beyond all doubt another relic of that ancient system so long paramount in all the regions of the north. It was natural that those traces should linger the longest among woods and hills, which were of old the favourite scenes of this Pagan worship. Even after the lapse of many Christian centuries, a superstitious reverence it still attached to some antique and spreading oaks among the forests of the Hartz and the Riesengebirgen;\* in our popular poetry the odorous linden is still invested with its character of magic; and the branches of the willow are in the hands of every fortune-telling gipsy. Many relics of the deserted faith were, indeed, preserved, but they soon assumed the character of mere vulgar delusions, and sunk far below the loftiness of their old religious destination. To the inspired prophetesses and mandrakes of northern antiquity, succeeded the tricks, the execrations, and the midnight dance of witches; and in place of Odin's Valhalla—the majestic congregation of gods and heroes—came the hauntings of the Rheingau, and the ghostly tumults of the Night of Moonwort.

In the mean time, the theology of Odin, after being banished from its native land, found a secure asylum in the Scandinavian north, where it yielded, not till after a long struggle, late and reluctantly, to the Christian faith, and from whence the knowledge of it, preserved in many glorious songs and legends, has in later days been communicated to ourselves. It is by means of these Scandinavian remains that we are now enabled to trace the poetry of the middle ages, and, in particular, the whole system of Teutonic opinions, to their true sources. Above all, we are indebted

\* The *Hills of the Giants*, on the borders of Bohemia.

for these advantages to the Icelandic Edda. This work seems to have received the shape in which it now appears somewhere between the ninth and the thirteenth centuries—between the age of Harald Harfagr, when the Normans first established themselves in Iceland, and the death of Snorro Sturleson and the suppression of the Icelandic freedom. In its later parts we find many allusions both to the Greek mythology, and to Christianity, partly introduced with a view of tracing similarities between these systems and the northern legends, partly for the purpose of connecting the history of the Scandinavian tribes with that of the ancient nations. But in the most admirable passages, and, above all, in the poetry of the elder Edda, there breathes, in its utmost purity, the true spirit of the northern theology. The perfect unity of this system is that which distinguishes it most remarkably from that of the Greeks. The Greek theology was perhaps too rich to permit of its being well and consistently represented in one picture. Besides, if we compare it with the northern, we cannot fail to observe a want of proper end or purpose in the whole of its arrangement. The divine and heroic world of the Greeks is perpetually losing itself in the world of men; their poetry in the world of prose and reality. But the theology of the north is consistent and entire; every thing is foretold by prophecies, and the last long-expected catastrophe is a perfect close. The whole resembles one progressive poem—one tragedy. From the commencement, which teaches how the earth and the world arose out of the carcass of a benumbed giant—and the description of those happier days when the holy ash Ysdragill began to grow green over the old abyss, (“that tree of life which extendeth its roots through all oceans, and spreads its branches over the universe”)—and the narrations how bold heroes and the friendly spirits of light overcame, in many combats, the might of the giants and the old powers of darkness, down to the last great mystery, the ruin of gods and Asae—of Odin and his comrades,—the whole is one great and connected poem of

nature and heroism. The real object upon which its interest depends is, as in almost all other poetical legends, the termination of a glorious and heroic world. The destiny of war is ever most hostile to the noblest, the most valiant, and the most graceful of heroes; and Odin assembles all that are slain in his Valhalla, that he may have the more friends and fellow-combatants in that last war against the power of his enemies—a war in which he is of old destined to be not the victor but the vanquished. The first incident in which this great object of the whole is set forth, is the death of Balder. As in the Trojan legends, by the death of the two noblest heroes, Hector and Achilles, so here also, by the death of Balder, “the favourite of all the gods, the most beautiful of warriors,” there is shadowed out the universal decay of the heroic world. His fate is fixed by destiny; in vain does the foot of Odin tread the path to Hades. Hela, like the Theban Sphinx, gives no answer but an enigma—an enigma which is to be explained by fearful tragedies, and secure to destruction the fated prey. Perhaps the Ossianic poetry—at least so much of it as is of genuine antiquity—had its origin about the same period with these; but as the knowledge of it was at all times confined to the small circle of the Scottish Gaels, and never exerted the smallest influence on the common literature of Europe, I shall reserve the consideration of it till another opportunity.

Among the Teutonic nations scattered over the different regions of Europe, their original love of poetry was manifested in a great number of attempts to set forth Christianity in verse, and to give a poetical clothing to the histories of the sacred writings. Many such attempts were made among the Saxons in England, and one in Southern Germany by Ottfried. These attempts, so far as the mere art of poetical composition is concerned, were, indeed, like some more modern attempts of much greater poets, not very successful. But they have been of great advantage to us, for they have supplied the most perfect means of information



with respect to the poetical language and versification of that time. Above all, they are valuable because these Christian poets did not invent a form of writing for themselves, but were contented with copying and adopting that of the heroic poems of the preceding ages. We are at least certain that this was the case with regard to Ottfried, for we have still in our hands a heroic and warlike poem of the same period, which agrees in all circumstances with the form of his writings. This is a war song used by Lewis, king of the East Franks, in his contest with the Normans. A song of such antiquity (for it is now more than nine hundred years old) is indeed, on account of that circumstance alone, an invaluable monument. But it contains one passage which is of some historical importance. The poet describes the solemn stillness and calm bravery of the marshalled army, before the moment of attack :—

“There were red cheeks in the ranks  
Of the war-delighting Franks.” \*

And a little afterwards he says—

“Now the song was sung,  
And the battle begun.” †

We can see from this that the same old German custom, which is described by Tacitus, of inspiring the soldiers for action by a heroic song, was still preserved, after the lapse of many centuries, among the armies of the Teutonic peoples. That great attention was still bestowed by the Christian Germans on heroic poetry, may be inferred from the opening of one of these old poems—one which certainly could not at first sight be supposed likely to contain any warlike allusions, since it is professedly a panegyric on St Annus, the Bishop of Cologne.

\* Blut schien en wangen  
Kampf-lustiger Franken.

† Lied war gesungen,  
Schlacht ward begonnen.

“Often have we heard bards tell,  
 How in the old time towers and cities fell,  
 How haughty kingdoms met their destined day,  
 And peerless champions bled their souls away!” \*

The proper subjects of all heroic poems—the fall of nations, and the contest of heroes—are here pointed out in a manner at once short and impressive.

Although the Nibelungen-lied was not in all probability reduced to its present form before the beginning of the thirteenth century, yet I think the present may be the fittest opportunity for directing your attention to a composition so nearly of the same class with those we have been considering.

That skilful unfolding of incidents, and almost dramatic vividness of representation which form the chief characteristic of the Homeric poems, are qualities which were peculiar to the Greeks, and have never been imitated with much success by the poets of any other people. But among the heroic poems of those of other nations which have remained satisfied with a more simple mode of poetry, this German poem claims a very high place—perhaps among all the heroic chivalrous poems of modern Europe it is entitled to the first. It is peculiarly distinguished by its unity of plan : it is a picture, or rather it is a series of successive pictures, each naturally following the other, and all delineated with great boldness and simplicity, and a total disregard of all superfluities. The German language appears in this work in a state of perfection to which, in the subsequent periods of its early history, it had no pretensions. Along with all its natural liveliness and strength, it seems at that time to have possessed a flexibility which soon afterwards gave place to a style of affectation, hardness, and perplexity. The heroic legends of all nations have, as I have already

\* “Wir hörten von helden oft mals singen  
 Und wie sie feste Burgen brachen,  
 Wie hohe königreiche all vorgingen  
 Und wie sich liebe kampfgenossen schieden.”

several times mentioned, a great deal in common, so far as their essence and purpose are concerned; their variety is only produced by their being imbued with the peculiar feelings, and composed in the peculiar measures, of different nations. In the Nibelungen-lied, in the same manner as in the legends of Troy and of Iceland, the interest turns on the fate of a youthful hero, who is represented as invested with all the attributes of beauty, magnanimity, and victory—but dearly purchasing all these perishable glories by the certainty of an early and a predicted death. In his person, as is usual, we have a living type both of the splendour and the decline of the heroic world. The poem closes with the description of a great catastrophe, borrowed from a half historical incident in the early traditions of the north. In this respect also, as in many others, we cannot fail to perceive a resemblance to the Iliad; if the last catastrophe of the German poem be one more tragical, bloody, and Titanic than any thing in Homer, the death of the German hero, on the other hand, has in it more solemnity and stillness, and is withal depicted with more exquisite touches of tenderness, than any similar scene in any heroic poem with which I am acquainted.

The Nibelungen-lied is, moreover, a poem abounding in variety: in it both sides of human life, the joyful as well as the sorrowful, are depicted in all their strength. The promise of the opening stanza is fulfilled—

“I sing of loves and wassellings, if ye will lend your ears,  
Of bold men’s bloody combatings, and gentle ladies’ tears.” \*

\* “Von freuden und festes zeiten, von weinen, und von klagen,  
Von kühner helden streiten, mogt ihr nun wunder horen sagen.”

## LECTURE VII.

OF THE MIDDLE AGE—OF THE ORIGIN OF THE MODERN EUROPEAN LANGUAGES—  
POETRY OF THE MIDDLE AGE—LOVE POETRY—CHARACTER OF THE NORMANS,  
AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE CHIVALROUS POEMS—PARTICULARLY THOSE  
WHICH TREAT OF CHARLEMAGNE.

WE often think of and represent to ourselves the middle age as a blank in the history of the human mind, an empty space between the refinement of antiquity and the illumination of modern times. We are willing to believe that art and science had entirely perished, that their resurrection after a thousand years' sleep may appear something more wonderful and sublime. Here, as in many others of our customary opinions, we are at once false, narrow-sighted, and unjust; we give up substance for gaudiness, and sacrifice truth to *effect*. The fact is, that the substantial part of the knowledge and civilisation of antiquity never was forgotten, and that for very many of the best and noblest productions of modern genius we are entirely obliged to the inventive spirit of the middle age. It is upon the whole extremely doubtful whether those periods which are the most rich in literature, possess the greatest share either of moral excellence or of political happiness. We are well aware that the true and happy age of Roman greatness long preceded that of Roman refinement and Roman authors; and I fear there is but too much reason to suppose that, in the history of the modern nations, we may find many examples of the same kind. But even if we should not at all take into our consideration these higher and more universal standards of the worth and excellence of ages and nations, and although we should entirely confine our attention to literature and intellectual cultivation alone, we ought still, I imagine, to be very far from viewing the period of the

middle ages with the fashionable degree of self-satisfaction and contempt.

If we consider literature in its widest sense, as the voice which gives expression to human intellect—as the aggregate mass of symbols in which the spirit of an age or the character of a nation is shadowed forth; then, indeed, a great and accomplished literature is, without all doubt, the most valuable possession of which any nation can boast. But if we allow ourselves to narrow the meaning of the word literature so as to make it suit the limits of our own prejudices, and expect to find in all literatures the same sort of excellencies, and the same sort of forms, we are sinning against the spirit of all philosophy, and manifesting our utter ignorance of all nature. Every where, in individuals as in species, in small things as in great, the fulness of invention must precede the refinements of art,—legend must go before history, and poetry before criticism. If the literature of any nation has had no such poetical antiquity before arriving at its period of regular and artificial development, we may be sure that this literature can never attain to a national shape and character, or come to breathe the spirit of originality and independence. The Greeks possessed such a period of poetical wealth in those ages (ages certainly not very remarkable for their refinement either in literature, properly so called, or in science) which elapsed between the Trojan adventures and the times of Solon and Pericles, and it is to this period that the literature of Greece was mainly indebted for the variety, originality, and beauty of its unrivalled productions. What that period was to Greece, the middle age was to modern Europe; the fulness of creative fancy was the distinguishing characteristic of them both. The long and silent process of vegetation must precede the spring, and the spring must precede the maturity of the fruit. The youth of individuals has been often called their spring-time of life; I imagine we may speak so of whole nations with the same propriety as of individuals. They also have their seasons

of unfolding intellect and mental blossoming. The age of crusades, chivalry, romance, and minstrelsy, was an intellectual spring among all the nations of the west.

Literature, however, may be considered in another point of view, besides this poetical one, in which our chief attention is bestowed on invention, feeling, and imagination. It may also be regarded as it is the great organ of tradition, by means of which the knowledge of the ancient world is transmitted to the modern, and not only preserved in its original integrity, but also daily augmented and improved by the natural progress of ages. The poetical department of literature is that which has been developed in the different vernacular dialects of modern Europe; the other, which has for its object the preservation of inherited knowledge, must be sought for in that Latin literature of the middle age which was the common property of all the nations of the west. Even with regard to this we shall find, if we consider the case with due attention, and enter into the true history and spirit of the middle age, that the progress of literature was something very different from what we are in general accustomed to suppose.

If we should take nothing more into consideration than poetry and the development of national intellect in the vernacular tongues, we might very naturally wish that no such Latin literature had ever existed, and that the dead language had gone altogether out of use. There is no doubt that its use contributed in no small degree to take away all life from history and philosophy, more particularly from the last. There was, indeed, something beyond measure barbarous and ruinous in the custom of treating all matters connected with science, learning, legislation, and state-policy, in a dead and foreign language. Its consequences were disadvantageous in many respects, but, above all, in regard to poetry. A great many poetical monuments of the Germans, and indeed of all the western nations, have perished, in consequence of the pains taken by well-meaning translators and would-be expounders, who were indefatigable in

rendering every thing into Latin, and clothing what was originally true poetry and heroic legend, in the disguises of dull prose and incredible history. Many poetical works have, in another point of view, been deprived of all their living influence on ages and peoples, by the folly of their authors, who consumed great natural powers in the vain attempt to do justice to a living fancy in a forgotten language. Of this I might quote a thousand unhappy examples; from the good nun Roswitha—the author of a neglected poem in Latin upon the achievements of the great Saxon emperor, which, had she written it in German, might have furnished us with a valuable monument of language, and history, and poetry too—down to Petrarch, who despised as juvenile and sentimental trifles those Italian love-poems which have rendered him immortal, and expected to establish his true fame on a now forgotten Latin epic in celebration of Scipio Africanus; nay, I might cite before you a whole band of true poets, the greater part Germans and Italians, who flourished so late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and wrote every thing in Latin.

But the consideration of all the very evident disadvantages which resulted from the employment of the Latin language in the middle age, must not make us forget that before the several dialects now in use had acquired some degree of precision and refinement, a common language was absolutely necessary in Western Europe, not only for the purposes of religious worship, learning, and education, but even for conducting the international affairs of the different states. The language which was adopted forms the invaluable bond of connexion by which the Old World is united with the New. Besides, in the countries whose present languages are of Roman origin, the Latin, in those days, was scarcely considered as a foreign or even as a dead language, but rather as the old and genuine language of the land, preserved in its regularity and purity by the men of learning and education, in opposition to the corrupt and vague dialects of the common people—the vulgar tongues, as they were



called. In those countries the Latin language ceased not to be a living one till the ninth or tenth century ; for about that time the language of the people, assuming in each country a separate form, began to be no longer viewed as a mere corruption of the old Latin, but as an altogether different language. The progress to this state of things was indeed so gradual, that we can seldom define the date of the great change. But it is evident that the delusion under which men lay in considering the Latin language as still alive, many centuries after it was really extinct, was very much prolonged by the perpetual use of that language in all the observances of religion, and in all the societies of the cloisters. It sustained daily alterations, but was never altogether laid aside.

The great legacy and inheritance of all the knowledge and ideas of the ancient world is, with justice, considered as a common good of mankind, which is committed to all ages and nations in their turn, which ought to be sacred in their eyes, and for the preservation of which posterity is entitled to call them to an account. The feelings of pain with which we contemplate any violent rupture in this bond, by which we are connected with the world of our ancestors, and those of disgust with which we repel the attempts of such as would injure or weaken it, are on the whole just and honourable feelings. But it is only when we find an age or a nation to have been capable of deliberately destroying, or treating with utter contempt and neglect, the monuments of ancient refinement ; in short, it is only in the case of a total ruin of science, that we can be entitled to heap upon them the terrible reproach of barbarity. No such total ruin ever did take place ; and wilful destruction, if it did sometimes occur in regard to the imitative arts, was at the least extremely rare so far as literature was concerned. I know of no wilful destruction of literary monuments but one—the burning of certain of the then extant amatory Greek poets, which took place in Constantinople pretty far down in the middle age, and was entirely owing to sacerdotal aversion for the ex-

tremely offensive indecencies of these authors. This moral squeamishness, which induced men to forget not only the indulgence at all times given to poetical imagination, but also the reverence due to all monuments of language and antiquity, may, it is true, appear very ridiculous in our eyes. But that the collectors and transcribers of the middle age (both in the Eastern and Western World) were, in general, tolerably free from any such over-scrupulous niceties, is pretty evident from the abundant collection of indecent poems in both the ancient languages, with which we have it still in our power to regale ourselves. Unfortunate accidents, and the events of war, have indeed occasioned the loss of many interesting monuments both of literature and antiquity. This has been the case even in the more recent times, and above all, since the invention of printing itself. How much more frequently must it have occurred in the times which preceded that invention, when instead of our enormous libraries of printed books, the learned had nothing but manuscripts, and these so costly that no one man could have access to many. Even in the most refined periods of the ancient world, long before Goths had possessed Rome, or Arabs Alexandria, whole libraries had fallen a prey to the ravages of hostile fire, and hundreds, nay, thousands of works had perished, of which no other copies were in existence. We are accustomed to lament over the loss of a few great works, and to inveigh with unmitigated severity against the barbarity of the middle ages. But that the loss of a single work or a single author furnishes no ground for accusing a whole period of barbarism, may be gathered from the well-known history of the books of Aristotle. It appears that even among the ancients themselves, such was the neglect of these writings, which we consider as among the most precious monuments of Grecian intellect, that there remained at one time but a single copy,—and that, too, rescued from destruction by an accident of the most extraordinary nature. This occurred in the very middle of the period which we are used to admire as the most brilliant era of literature and refinement among the Greeks and Romans. And even

allowing that historical criticism may furnish us with some reasons to doubt the literal accuracy of this account, yet that will very little affect my present argument. If this did not happen with regard to Aristotle, we are quite sure that the same thing happened to many other great authors, with only this difference, that the dangers from which his writings escaped proved fatal to theirs. In the western countries of Europe, after the time of Charlemagne, the multiplying of manuscripts was a work pursued with the most zealous and systematical application. I doubt whether the same object was ever honoured with so much public patronage, either in Rome, or Alexandria, or any where else, during the most polished periods of later antiquity. That even in this respect, Christian writings and Christian authors were more attended to than any others, is not to be denied, and perhaps is scarcely to be blamed. But how many of the heathen and ancient Roman writers were preserved exclusively in the West! Constantinople was never plundered by the Goths, nor subjected to the license of any whom we are pleased to call barbarians, till the period of the Crusades and the Turks. And yet I have little doubt that those Greek books which have been preserved for us by the Byzantines, bear far less proportion to the incalculable riches of the old Grecian literature, than the Latin books preserved in the West do to the very limited literature of ancient Rome.

Upon the whole, in the first part of the middle ages, the scientific education was very wisely directed into the channels most favourable for the maintenance of ancient learning. After those studies which had an immediate reference to Christianity, the first place was universally given to that of the Latin tongue—the only vehicle of learning which was then in use; the most important parts of the mathematics were carefully taught; and in the cloisters, to preserve the writings of the ancient authors was not barely considered as a matter of duty, but formed the most favourite exercise of monastic skill. With regard to language, which, in our present subject of inquiry, occupies the most important place, we know that the pupils in the tenth century were

taught rhetoric according to the rules of Cicero and Quintilian; and I should doubt whether either ancient or modern times could have supplied them with better guides. That the authors of the eleventh century wrote more agreeably and perspicuously in Latin than those of the latest Roman age and the sixth century, is well known to all who are acquainted with the literary history of the time. In all those qualities of good writing which are attainable by men composing in a dead language, their superiority is most evident. Next to language and its monuments, nothing else was of so great importance as the preservation of the mathematics, which are the foundation of all knowledge of nature, and the sources of so many sciences, inventions, and technical expedients, which have the greatest influence on life. The rapid increase of wealth and cities, particularly in Germany under the Saxon emperors, and the flourishing state of architecture and many other arts which imply knowledge and science, are sufficient proofs of the labour and exertion which were in these times bestowed on preserving from oblivion the mathematical, mechanical, and technical acquirements of the ancients.

What we have most reason to lament is the separation which took place between the West and the knowledge and treasures of the Greek language. But even here there was, in truth, no such thing as any absolute separation. The Greek language was certainly not unknown in Germany, at least between the time of Charlemagne, who learned Greek himself in his old age, and established Greek professors in his different cities of the empire, and that of the two last Othos of the imperial house of Saxony, who were both skilled in Greek sufficiently for the purposes of conversation. Although, as might naturally be expected, the Bible and the Fathers were always the chief objects of attention, we know that Bruno, Archbishop of Cologne, who was also a descendant of the same illustrious house, invited learned men from Greece for the express purpose of enabling himself, and through him others, to become acquainted with the

profane writers, the historians and philosophers of antiquity. Under the dynasty of the Saxon Cæsars, who were perpetually connected by marriages with the court of Constantinople, the north of Germany was adorned with a profusion of beautiful churches, all more or less in imitation of that first model of all Christian architecture, the Greek church of St Sophia. Upon the whole, during this period—from the tenth to the twelfth century inclusive—Germany possessed not only more political importance, but also more intellectual cultivation, than any other country in Europe.

The reproach, then, which is commonly thrown out against the Teutonic nations—that they introduced barbarity and ignorance into all those provinces of the Roman empire to which their victories reached, is, at least in the extent which is commonly given to it, altogether false and ungrounded. To none, however, of all these nations is it applied with so much injustice as to the Goths, who lived at the time of the first northern inroads. For many centuries before these expeditions commenced, the Goths had been already Christians; they were well acquainted with the importance of regular laws, and with the relations of the learned and religious orders of society; and the truth is, that far from promoting any work of destruction in the Roman provinces, they were indefatigable, so far as their powers and circumstances admitted of it, in forwarding and maintaining the interests of science. The only exception to this is to be found in those times when the Gothic tribes entered Italy under the guide of a foreign, a savage, and a heathen conqueror; or when, in some particular instances, they were exasperated by party hatred and Arian bigotry, to take too severe revenge against the equal hatred and bigotry of their Catholic opponents. Even the last flourishing era of what might still be called ancient Roman literature, took place under Theodorick; and never did the mock patriotism of Italians take up a more ridiculous idea than in the favourite theme of their later poets—the deliverance of Italy from the power of the Goths. In the time of Theodo-

rick, and under the government of the Goths, Italy was just beginning to enjoy the opening of a new period of happiness. The true misery and the true barbarism began when the Goths were expelled, and Italy submitted her neck once more to the deadening tyranny of Byzantine eunuchs and satraps. Let us only compare, for a moment, the activity and life of Western Europe, her nationalities, her adventures, and her chivalrous poetry, with the long and mortal sleep under which the Eastern Empire lay for a thousand years, and we shall have no difficulty in deciding where the charges of sloth and ignorance ought to fall. And yet the Byzantines were in possession of much greater literary riches, and of several useful inventions, with which the West was entirely unacquainted. The matter of chief importance in all civilisation and all literature is not the dead treasures we possess, but the living uses to which we apply them.

But the effect was, beyond all comparison, more unfortunate in the case of those wandering and conquering Teutonic nations which were not yet Christians ; these were much more rude in their manners than those we have as yet been considering ; they had no acquaintance either with the social or the scientific refinements of the Romans. Such were the Franks in Gaul, and the Saxons in Britain. If we must fix upon some period as that of complete void—as a time of ignorance, darkness, and destruction — we shall find the nearest approximation to what we wish in the age which elapsed between the reigns of Theodorick and Charlemagne. But while Italy remained bowed down under the barbarous oppression of Byzantium, the light of knowledge had found its refuge in the cloisters of Ireland and Scotland ; and no sooner had the Saxons in England received the first rudiments of knowledge along with their Christianity, than they at once carried all branches of science to a height of perfection at that time altogether unrivalled among the nations of the West. By them this light was carried into France and Germany—there never more to be extinguished. For, from this time,

knowledge was not only systematically preserved, but unweariedly cultivated and extended, insomuch that the proper period of revival should, I think, be placed not in the time of the Crusades, but in that of Charlemagne. But even in the darkest period of all, that between the sixth century and the eighth, the foundations were already laid for that mighty engine of instruction which was afterwards perfected by the wisdom of Charlemagne. The establishment of learned cloisters and brotherhoods had already commenced. It is to the after extension of these spiritual corporations, by whose exertions lands were rendered fruitful, and peoples civilised, and sciences useful, and states secure, that Western Europe is indebted for the superiority which she attained over the Byzantines on the one hand, who were possessed of more hereditary knowledge, and the Arabs on the other, who had every advantage that external power and proselytising enthusiasm could afford them. That the result should have been what we now see it, could scarcely, I should suppose, have been believed to be within the reach of possibility by any cotemporary spectator. While Alfred lived almost in the poverty of a poet, and while Charlemagne practised, in his own palace, the frugality of a monk, how must their attempts in the cause of science have been limited by the narrowness of their means! and what, on the contrary, would have been too much for Haroon al Rasheed to perform—living as he did in the midst of the untroubled splendour of Bagdad, and having it in his power to forward the cause of science by all the aids which ingenuity could invent or magnificence supply? The result may give us an important lesson, and teach us not to repose our confidence in the munificence of kings. Science is not made to be cultivated in obedience to the command of a monarch. He lends it indeed a temporary favour, but it is only that it may increase his own fame, and throw additional lustre around his throne. Caliphs and sultans attempted in vain to effect what was slowly and calmly accomplished in the unpretending cloisters of the West.



The exertions of Charlemagne in securing the independence, and diffusing the establishment of religious houses, have entitled him to the warmest gratitude of Europe, and the admiration of every cultivated age. But we must not conceal from ourselves, that great as were the merits of Charlemagne, both in regard to the vernacular and the Latin literature of Europe, they were still inferior to those of Alfred. That wise and virtuous monarch was not only, like Charlemagne, the unwearied patron of learning in all its branches ; he was himself a scholar and a philosopher, and he even contributed more than any other individual towards the elegant formation of the Anglo-Saxon tongue. But the successful expeditions of the Danes threw back the progress of England ; and the literary establishments founded by Charlemagne in France and southern Germany were disturbed in their infancy, by the attacks made on the one part of his empire by the Normans, and on the other by the Hungarians. The literature which flourished soon afterwards under the Saxon emperors, was in every respect far superior to that of the days of Alfred or Charlemagne. At that time Germany was rich above all other things in good writers of history, from Eginhard, the secretary of Charlemagne, down to Otto von Freysingen, a prince of the house of Babenberg, who was son to St Leopold, and grandson to the great Barbarossa of the imperial family of Hohenstaufen. Her riches, in this respect, were indeed greater than those of any other country in Europe ; nor is the circumstance to be wondered at, for she was, in fact, the centre of all European politics. It is a very common thing to hear all those Latin histories of the middle age, which were written by clergymen, classed together under the same contemptuous appellation of “ Monkish chronicles.” They who indulge in such ridicule, must, beyond all doubt, be either ignorant or forgetful that these monkish writers were very often men of princely descent ; that they were intrusted with the most important affairs of government, and therefore could best explain them ; that they were the ambassadors and travel-

lers of the times ; that they often penetrated into the remote East, and the still more obscure regions of the North, and were, indeed, the only persons capable of describing foreign countries and manners ; that, in general, they were the most accomplished and intelligent men whom the world could then produce ; and that, in one word, if we were to have any histories at all of those ages, it was absolutely necessary they should be written by the Monks. The reproaches which we cast out against the men and the manners of the middle age are, indeed, not unfrequently altogether absurd and inconsistent. When we wish to depict the corruption of the clergy, we inveigh against them for tyrannizing over kingdoms and conducting negotiations ; but if we talk of their works, then they were all ignorant slothful Monks, who knew nothing of the world, and therefore could not possibly write histories. Perhaps the very best of all situations for a writer of history is one not widely differing from that of a Monk—one in which he enjoys abundant opportunities of gaining experimental knowledge of men and their affairs, but is, at the same time, independent of the world and its transactions, and has full liberty to mature in retirement his reflections upon that which he has seen. Such was the situation of many of those German historians who flourished in the days of the Saxon emperors. The more the study of history advances, the more universally are their merits recognised. But if Germany had the advantage in history, the superiority of France and England was equally apparent in philosophy. These countries, indeed, had already produced several distinguished philosophical writers, even before the influence of the Arabians had introduced the monopolising despotism of Aristotle. In the ninth century, there arose that profound inquirer who, as it is doubtful whether he was a Scotsman or an Irishman, is now known by the reconciling name of Scotus Erigena. No less profound, though somewhat more limited in their application, were the views of Anselm. Abelard was both a thinker and an orator ; his language was elegant, and his

knowledge of antiquity extensive—praises which he shares with his illustrious scholar, John of Salisbury.

For each of the nations which speak Romanic dialects, there must have existed an interval of chaos and confusion, before they set themselves free from the rules of the Latin language, and began to give to their own new dialect the shape of an independent tongue. But for the interference of certain unfortunate accidents, the situation of the Teutonic nations must, in this respect, have been far more favourable than that of the others. For it is a thing infinitely more easy to cultivate at the same time two languages radically distinct, than to give a new form to a language which has either been changed by some internal revolution, or mingled in great part with the elements of some other language. That must always be a work of great labour and patience. But it happened very unfortunately for the development of the Teutonic language, that those of its dialects which were first cultivated were successively forgotten in consequence of political events, and that so the mighty work of its formation was more than once to be begun again from the commencement. The Gothic language, which was the first that attained some degree of regularity, perished along with the nation that spoke it. The Anglo-Saxon attained to an infinitely higher degree of perfection, and we may even say, that, in the days of Alfred, it already possessed all the necessary parts of a complete literature; a great many works had been composed in it, not only poems and translations, but also prose histories, and treatises concerning many departments of science. But this language also, although many of its monuments are still in existence, passed away in consequence of the Norman conquest, and a considerable interval elapsed before the present English language was formed out of the mixture of the Anglo-Saxon and the French. The work of polishing the Teutonic tongue was, therefore, to begin again for the third time. This took place in the ninth century: for it was then that our present High Dutch began to be in some measure developed. If any

attempts had been made upon it in the preceding century, they were irregular and unimportant in their results. In the monuments which we possess of it during the ninth century, we can perceive the same traces of weakness and unsettledness which characterise every language at the time when it is beginning to recover itself after the effects of a great mixture or revolution in its elements. The High Dutch of that period was exactly in the situation in which the Romanic dialects were in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. We are accustomed to talk of our own language as having, above all others, the advantage of being pure and original. This might be very true in its utmost extent of the old Saxon language, but nothing can be less so of our present German. Ours is a modern dialect, which arose in the Carolingian age out of the confusion of many old German dialects, and no inconsiderable infusion of Latin vocables; and ought, in truth, to be classed among those languages which arose out of the political intermixture of the Roman and Teutonic nations. Its origin and early development are, however, well worthy of much consideration, for it was long the language of the most cultivated nation in Europe, and its formation was the favourite object of some of the greatest geniuses the world has ever seen. The true old German language, that was originally and universally spoken by all the Teutonic tribes, was that old Saxon which attained the height of its perfection in England under Alfred the Great. That the Saxons of Northern Germany spoke the same language with those of England, admits of no doubt; and even the Franks originally made use of it. It was common to all the Germans of the North. The Romans made use of Frankish interpreters in England; the British Saxons required no interpreters at all in Sweden; when King Alfred entered the Danish camp in the disguise of a minstrel, he sung songs written not in a foreign language, but in his own; and although there might perhaps be some small difference of pronunciation, he was perfectly intelligible to his audience. Which, then, it will be asked, of all these

German dialects was the language of the poems collected by Charlemagne? Not the Gothic, for that was entirely gone, or at best understood only by a few scattered inhabitants of the mountains of Austria; nor the High Dutch, for that language was only beginning to assume a regular appearance half a century later, and received its name of Frankish, expressly because it had its origin in the Carolingian age: the name of the ruling Teutonic tribe being used, according to the fashion of that period, to denote every thing that was Teutonic. Now, it is evident that the poems collected by Charlemagne must have possessed some antiquity; they must have existed for two centuries, or at least for one. I have little hesitation in saying, that I believe those poems to have been composed in the old Saxon language, the same which Alfred wrote, and which was spoken by Charlemagne himself, whenever he did not make use of Latin; for we must recollect that the favourite residence of Charlemagne was in the Rhenish Netherlands, the old patrimony of the Franks, whose language was originally the same with that of the Saxons. And if this be so, the remark which I have made is not merely interesting for the lover of language and poetry, but may be of considerable importance to the student of history himself.

The origin of the High Dutch language seems to me to be best explained in the following manner. The original seat of all the Teutonic tribes was on the borders of the Baltic Sea, and each of them introduced into its dialect greater changes in proportion as it removed to a greater distance from the neighbourhood of those ancient settlements. The Goths, for example, were the first to extend their conquests; they founded a great empire between the Baltic and the Black Sea, and living there in the midst of many foreign nations, from each of which they were continually borrowing particular words, their dialect soon came to be intelligible only to themselves, and to assume all the appearances of a new and distinct language. In the southern regions of Germany, above all, in the Alpine districts, the

common influence of climate produced its effect ; and the Teutonic dialect, spoken in those regions, became hard and guttural, like all languages of mountainous countries. The inextricable mingling of the various Teutonic dialects in Southern Germany, was caused by the successive empire and colonisations of the Goths and the Franks. The intermixture of Latin is easily accounted for by the Roman colonies on the Danube, and the early adoption of the Christian religion by the inhabitants of all those regions.

Of all the Romanic dialects, the first which attained any polish, was that of Provence, probably because it had less than any other been exposed to the danger of foreign intermixture. The old language of the country had been very early forgotten in this first of all the Roman provinces, and the settlements of the Teutonic invaders in its territory were very short-lived and inconsiderable. To close, in one word, this hasty review of the modern European languages, the two dialects which first received a regular development were those of the countries which had been least exposed to the mixture of foreign inhabitants,—the Provencial on the one hand, and the High Dutch on the other. When compared with the other more blended dialects, the first of these may be considered as a pure Romanic, the other as a pure German language. Of three other Romanic dialects, which had been exposed to the greatest mixture of Teutonic—the Italian, the Spanish, and the Northern French—this last is the most removed from the Latin, and was the last to arrive at the highest point of its perfection. But the youngest of all these languages is the English ; in it the mixture was far stronger than in any of the others, in so much, indeed, that it is not easy to decide which of its elements—the Germanic or the Romanic—has the predominance. The interval of chaos and confusion which necessarily precedes any mixture of languages, was of longer duration in England than in any other part of Europe. That even these circumstances, however, are not incapable of producing very favourable consequences, is sufficiently evident, not only

from the characteristic beauty, power, precision, and elegance of the English language, but also from the high and peculiarly national spirit of the English literature. The English literature stands in the midst between the German and the Romanic, and is more original than either.

The universal awakening of a new life and a youth of feeling in the age of the Crusades, peculiarly manifested itself in the sudden and magical unfolding of that poesy which received, among the Provencials, the name of *La Gaye Science*, and which, diffusing its influence over all the intellectual nations of Europe, gave birth to a rich and various literature of chivalrous poetry and love songs. Although it is the spirit of love breathing even from the chivalrous poems of that period, which forms in truth the distinction between them and all other poems of the heroic kind, I shall begin with considering those which were more expressly of an amatory nature. The poetry of love, therefore, flourished first among the Provencials, who transmitted it to the Italians. The first Italian poets wrote frequently in the language of Provence. This language is now, indeed, altogether extinct, but many works composed in it are still preserved in manuscript collections. Next to France the earliest flourishing period of the *gay science* was in Germany—chiefly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The love poetry of Italy attained not its perfection till it came into the hands of Petrarch in the fourteenth, and the proper era of it, among the Spaniards, was in the fifteenth century. Nay, the last celebrated Spanish poet, who procured to himself a great name by poems of this class, was yet living far in the sixteenth century. This was Castillejo, who followed the first Ferdinand from his native country into Austria.

The poetry of love was developed differently in the different countries of Europe, and had in each a formation in harmony with the spirit of the nation. With the exception of the Italians, I imagine that no one nation borrowed much in this matter from another; while, on the contrary, the poetry of chivalry was transplanted from one to another,



and was considered the common property of them all. Even the form of the composition varied in each country. The only thing that was common to them all was rhyme, and indeed a very musical use of it, which, at first sight, might appear to be mere playfulness and profusion. But, in all probability, this universal coincidence is to be sought for in the nature of the music then in vogue, for almost all the love poems seem to have been made expressly to be sung.

That the Germans borrowed their love poetry from that of the Provencials is very often asserted ; but I think there is little reason for thinking so, particularly as we are quite certain that the Germans had love poems of their own at a much earlier period. For even so early as the reign of Lewis the Pious, it appears that it was found necessary to address an edict to the nuns of the German cloisters, admonishing them to restrain their inordinate passion for singing love songs or *mynelieder*. It is true that in the age of chivalry, some of the German princes, who had large possessions in Italy, wrote poems in the Provencial, but this is a matter of no importance in regard to the poetry of the Germans. Had that been borrowed, there is no doubt but the minstrels of Germany would have been as willing to confess their obligations as Petrarch afterwards was ; and the more so, that the German authors of narrative chivalrous poems are fond of owning, even more frequently than we could have wished, how much they were indebted to the invention of their Provencial or French predecessors. However this might have been, there is no doubt that the whole form, and character, and spirit of the German love poems are essentially different from those of the French or the Provencial. The German collection of this kind is, moreover, by far the richest in existence.

The circumstance which affords us most delight in these productions is the spirit of gentleness and tenderness with which they are imbued ; and our delight is mingled with not a little of wonder, when we learn that their authors were not unfrequently princes and knights, with whose charac-

ters we are familiar in history, as among the boldest and the most heroic of their time. But this apparent contradiction is nevertheless very consistent with nature; and true tenderness is never so engaging as when it is united with manly valour. In the midst of the most warlike life nature still leaves room for the affections, and tempers the rage of arms with the soothing influence of love and compassion. That old melody which is commonly ascribed to the English Richard, breathes the very spirit of calm dejectedness, and is, indeed, among the most precious of monuments, if it be really the production of the lion-hearted king.

The softness of feeling, and the musical elegance of language by which these German poems are distinguished, have induced certain critics to throw out against them the reproaches of uniformity and triflingness. The reproach of uniformity strikes me as being a very singular one; it is as if we should condemn the spring, or a garden, for the multitude of its flowers. It is perhaps true enough that ornaments of many kinds are more delightful when they occur singly, than when we see them gathered together in masses. Laura herself could scarcely have read her own praises without weariness, had she been presented at any one time with all the verses which Petrarch composed upon her even during the period of her life. The impression of uniformity arises from our seeing these poems bound together into large collections—a fate which was probably neither the design nor the hope of those who composed them. But, in truth, not only love songs, but all lyrical poems, if they are really true to nature, and aim at nothing more than the expression of individual feelings, must necessarily be confined within a very narrow range both of thought and of sentiment. Of this we find many examples in the high species of lyrical poetry among all nations. Feeling must occupy the first place wherever it is to be powerfully and poetically represented; and where feeling is predominant, variety and richness of thought are always things of very secondary importance. The truth is, that

great variety in lyrical poetry is never to be found, except in those ages of imitation when men are fond of treating of all manner of subjects, in all manner of forms. Then, indeed, we often find the tone and taste of twenty different ages and nations brought together within the same collection, and observe that the popularity of the poet is increased exactly in proportion as he descends from his proper dignity—when simplicity is sacrificed to conceits and epigrams, and the ode sinks into an *occasional copy of verses*.

The second criticism which stigmatises these poems as trifling, is indeed founded on truth ; but I am extremely doubtful whether that prove any thing against the merits of the poems. Even the ancients, although the full violence of passion is often enough depicted in their Erotic poems, have nevertheless recognised, that in its nature the feeling of love is a playful and sportive one, by the mode in which they have represented Cupid in their mythology, and the many beautiful allegories and fictions which arose out of their idea of the childishness of love. That love itself was in the age of chivalry one of the most violent of passions, and often gave rise to the most daring adventures, and the most tragical catastrophes, might be easily gathered from the general character of that time. The histories of these ages are full of such examples. But this serious and passionate side of love was very seldom brought forward in the poems of the age. These are not indeed so destitute of all illusions to the senses as the Platonic allegories and sonnets of Petrarch. But even in this respect they are not in general remarkable for any violent expressions of feeling. The favourite, almost the exclusive theme of these poets, was that view of the passion which opens the freest space for the exercise of the fancy. From that high estimation of the female sex which was originally peculiar to the Teutonic nations, after it had been refined and exalted by the milder manner and loftier morality of the Christian religion, there arose a systematic tenderness of feeling which has indeed long since degene-

rated into the empty forms of gallantry, but which, so long as it remained in possession of its power, was the fountain of every thing noble and graceful both in manners and in poetry. It was at least in some degree on account of the prevalence of such feelings as these, that the German poets have restrained themselves from filling their verses with ornaments which were certainly very much within their reach. The Provencial *court and laws of love*, and the metaphysical casuistry which was elsewhere so unweariedly employed in the solution of amatory questions and problems, were never introduced among the Germans. Their compositions are indeed rude and unskilful when compared with those of the accomplished and meditative Petrarch, or some of the early poets of Castille; but in return they possess more strength of feeling, and manifest greater capacity of love for nature and the beautiful.

Epic poetry belongs altogether to the world which had gone before us. That poet of any refined and polished age who dares to be a poet after the manner of the minstrels of antiquity—to be truly epic—will always be looked upon as a remarkable exception; he will be honoured and revered by all posterity, as a high gift of nature to the age and country in which he appears. But in dramatic poetry art maintains her pre-eminence; it is only in an age of knowledge and elegance that tragedies and comedies can be written. As youth in individuals is the period most abounding in feeling, so does lyrical poetry flourish most in the youth of nations. The age of Crusades was the youth of modern Europe. It was the time of unsophisticated feelings and ungovernable passions—the era of love, war, enthusiasm, and adventure.

After the Crusades, perhaps, nothing had so much influence in giving a new direction to the imagination of the European nations as the expeditions of the Normans. The foundations of chivalry were indeed every where laid in the original modes of thinking of all the Germanic nations: the poetical belief in the wonderful—in gigantic heroes, in moun-

tain spirits, mermaids, elves, and dwarfish sorcerers—had every where kept its hold in the imagination, from the days of the old mythology of the North. But into all these superstitions, and all these opinions, a new life was infused by the arrival of the Normans. They were fresh from the North, and had breathed in its original purity the atmosphere of poetry and chivalry. Neither did they lose all this when they became converted to Christianity, and learned to speak French; their character had strength enough not only to preserve itself unbroken, but to diffuse a portion of its influence wherever they came; in so much that a visible change was introduced by them not only into France, but into the whole of Europe. They were living models of adventure and enthusiasm; they conquered England and Sicily, and led the way in the Crusades. Their whole opinions and lives were poetic, and the wonderful was the perpetual object of all their worship and all their ambition. It was by no means strange that the history of Charlemagne should have peculiar charms for the Normans. The whole of it was immediately reduced by them to the shape of chivalrous poetry. The battle of Roncesvalles, in which the army of the Franks was overcome by that of the Arabs and Spaniards, and in which Roland died, was indeed, as it stands in history, an event rather unfortunate than glorious for the Franks and Charlemagne. But that, in spite of all this, the celebration of this battle had become very early a favourite theme of popular poetry, may perhaps be accounted for in this way—that, though unfortunate at Roncesvalles, Charlemagne was in the end successful in setting limits to the progress of the Saracen arms, and erecting the Pyrenees into an impregnable bulwark before the liberties of Europe. The religious view of the matter also might not be without its influence. Roland fell in battle with the enemies of our faith; and although vanquished on earth, there was the sure crown of victory laid up for him in heaven. He had died like a hero in the cause of God, and was classed by the multitude among the glorious army of martyrs. It must have been

on some such principles as these, that the famous song of Roland—used in battle even by the Normans themselves—had been composed. For otherwise the death of an unsuccessful hero could scarcely have been selected as the subject of an animating war-song. In the age of the Crusades the whole history of Charlemagne, the battle of Roncevalles, and the death of Roland, were represented by the poets as scenes of a religious warfare. An example for the knights and adventurers of the Crusades was shadowed out in the glorious names and achievements of Charles and his Paladins; nay, so far were things carried, that a fabulous Crusade in the ninth century was invented for the express purpose of ascribing it to Charlemagne. The authentic history of the great Frankish Emperor soon became scarcely recognisable under the disguise which it assumed—in the midst of sultans, magicians, genii, and all the fables of the East. By and by comical characters and adventures began to be mingled with the rest. In process of time, the oral narratives of the Crusades supplied the West with a copious assortment of oriental fictions; and above all, men read the travels of Marco Polo, (a production whose impudent exaggerations procured for its author the name of Messer Milione;) the consequence was, that there was nothing of the marvellous to be seen or imagined between China and Morocco which did not somehow or other find its niche in the poetry which treated of Charlemagne and Roland. That poetry lost all trace of the true achievements and wars of Charlemagne, (which in their original shape might have furnished excellent materials for a serious heroic poem,) and came to be considered merely as a form or vehicle wherein all possible fictions might be fairly introduced; and where the fancy might practise her boldest gambols in the world of wonders and impossibilities. Such is the shape in which it appears in the writings of Ariosto. This great genius, confiding solely in the magic of his language and narrative, has ventured to make his poem as irregular as his materials were heterogeneous; he is continually breaking off one story and

commencing another ; he scatters over every thing a sparkling of wit, comedy, and satire. He is the most inimitable of all poets.

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## LECTURE VIII.

THIRD SET OF CHIVALROUS POEMS—ARTHUR AND THE ROUND TABLE—INFLUENCE OF THE CRUSADES AND THE EAST ON THE POETRY OF THE WEST—ARABIC AND PERSIAN POEMS—FERDUSI—LAST REMODELLING OF THE NIBELUNGEN-LIED—WOLKRAM VON ESCHENBACH, TRUE PURPOSE OF THE GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE—LATER POESY OF THE CHIVALROUS PERIOD—POEM OF THE CID.

THERE are three different sets of fables and histories from which the subjects of the chivalrous poems of the middle age are principally taken. The first of these consists in the legends of Gothic, Frankish, and Burgundian heroes, during the times of the great northern emigrations ; these form the subjects of the Nibelungen-lied, and of those fragments which are collected together under the name of the Heldenbuch. For this set of heroic legends there is in general some foundation in history ; they all breathe the pure northern spirit, are closely connected with the traditions of the old heathenish antiquity and mythology of the Gothic nations, and have, for the most part, been celebrated in the Scandinavian as well as in the German dialects. The second great subject of chivalrous poetry is Charlemagne—more particularly his war against the Saracens, his defeat at Roncesvalles, and the achievements of his Paladins. The narratives which treat of these are in general very far removed from all historical truth ; the active Frankish hero is transformed in them into a mere indolent monarch, after the fashion of the eastern sultans—a mistake which is probably to be accounted for by the circumstance of the chief poems concerning Charlemagne having been composed by Normans, who



pretty naturally imagined that great and warlike prince to have been, with all the glory which surrounded him, something not very unlike the monarchs whom they themselves found in possession of his throne. However this might have been, it is certain that the poetical histories of Charlemagne became very soon intermingled with a large proportion of incidents purely comic, and altogether covered over with a veil of absurd and fantastic machinery, through which the original facts cannot, without great difficulty, be recognised. The fate of the third set of chivalrous topics—King Arthur and the Round Table—was not very different from that of the second. The original groundwork of history became soon very nearly undiscernible from the clothing of oriental marvels—Crusades, and Indian achievements—which were heaped upon it. The historical Arthur, a Christian king of Britain, of the Celtic race, and his wars with the first heathenish Saxon invaders of England, could have furnished, indeed, a very limited range for poetical embellishment. But the very narrowness of the field was the cause of its unparalleled richness of cultivation; and the poets made ample amends for the original insignificance of Arthur, by investing him, in their fictions, with all the attributes of perfect chivalry. He is the ideal of a knight, and all the poems which treat of him and his period, have more real object and purpose than those concerning Charlemagne and his Paladins. With the history of Arthur there are besides interwoven many engaging poems, in which love is depicted in the most beautiful incidents of the chivalrous life. Of these the most remarkable is throughout of an elegiac character, as might be gathered from the name itself of *Tristram*. The tenderness of this elegiac colouring is well adapted to the nature of such a narrative; it harmonises well with those feelings of darkness, depression, and perplexity which rush into every mind, where we are drawn to survey the spectacle of a heroic life—when we reflect on the fleetingness of youth, beauty, valour, and the at best perishable and unsatisfactory nature of all earthly glories

and enjoyments. The poetical clothing of the marvellous and the chivalrous, under which the fate of love is represented, has the effect of at once beautifying the fiction, and ennobling the feeling. It is in vain that modern poets, imprisoned as they are within a world of present and prosaic realities, endeavour to atone for the want of poetry by a display of natural and moral knowledge, and the wiredrawn minuteness of psychology. Not many learn to know either the world or man out of books. The true end of poetry is to awaken or restore aspirations and feelings which are the poetry of nature; and by setting all things in the most beautiful light, and investing all things with loveliness and magic, not so much to ennoble or exalt our feelings, as to preserve and sustain them in their natural element of beauty. Among all the great and epic poems of love and chivalry in the middle age, the first place is given by all nations to *Tristram*; but that we may not be fatigued by uniformity of fiction, the airy and lively legend of *Launcelot* is placed by the side of its more grave and elegiac representations.

But besides all this, the poetical historians of Arthur and his Round Table had an altogether different object in their view. They endeavoured, under the form of Arthur and his knights, (in whom was supposed to be represented the perfection of all chivalrous virtue,) to shadow forth the idea of a spiritual knighthood, true, like that other chivalry, to the obligations of a solemn vow, proving itself like it by achievement and by suffering, and rising like it, by slow and gradual advances, to the summit of its perfection. This idea, however, is not allowed to interfere with the external rules of their fiction, or to make them sacrifice any of those adventures and wonders of love and war in the east and the west, from which the poetry of those days derived its most favourite embellishments. Under the name of *St Graal*, there is brought together a whole train of such allegorical deeds of chivalry; the knight is represented as labouring, by incessant exertions, to make himself worthy of gaining access to the holy places, and the deliverance of these is

supposed to be the highest end of his calling. And yet there is every reason to believe that in all these poems the object was not merely to shadow out a spiritual and allegorical chivalry, but also to embody the peculiar ideas of a spiritual and yet a real chivalry, which was then in all its glory—the chivalry of the religious orders of knighthood, such as the Templars and the Knights of St John. In a historical point of view, this may be of no inconsiderable importance. Lessing, the first, so far as I know, who started the idea, was one well qualified, both by his erudition and his judgment, to form a proper opinion on such a subject; and they who are familiar with such topics will, I imagine, have no difficulty in agreeing with him, provided they read again these old poems with a view to this particular consideration. The purpose is indeed sufficiently manifest even in the French romances of St Graal, but infinitely more so in the more elaborate productions of the Germans.

This third set of fables, then—that relating to King Arthur and the Round Table—had a peculiar, sometimes a doubly, allegorical character of their own. But when I said that this set of fables, along with those of the Nibelungen and of Charlemagne, formed the only subjects of the poetry of the middle age, I perhaps expressed myself rather too strongly. A crowd of other fictions diverge in all points from these: they formed only the centre point and kernel of the imagination. I must now, however, go on to consider under what varieties of shape this chivalrous poetry appeared among all the different European nations, how long it lasted, by what gradations it gradually lost, in each country, its original character and destination, and in particular by what circumstances it so happened that in almost no instance did it ever reach that degree of skilful beauty and development of which it might every where have been susceptible. But before I proceed to this, I must pause to say a single word concerning the influence of the Crusades on the poetry of the West; and, above all, to direct your attention to the

share of that influence which originally belonged to the poetry of the East.

The chief elements of all this influence were, without doubt, no other than the incidents of the Crusades themselves, and the power which the spirit in which their expeditions were undertaken must at all times have had of arousing the imagination. The achievements of Godfrey of Bouillon were sung in the very time in which they took place, and had no need of the mystery of ages in order to make them poetical. But the poets were, no doubt, more partial to the fabulous histories of Charlemagne and Arthur, because they were well aware that the more distant their scene was laid, the more room had they for the exercise of their fancy.

The influence exerted on Europe by the poetry of the East, made known through the Crusades, was very considerable in comparison with what we generally suppose it to have been; and that which really did exist belonged in the greatest part—almost exclusively—to the Persians, not the Arabians. Among all the works of oriental fiction there are two in particular which contain within themselves the best specimens of oriental fancy, and enable us at once to perceive in what this influence consisted, and what sort of spirit that was which was either first introduced into Europe, or which, at least, augmented the originally kindred spirit of northern poetry, by means of the Crusades. The “*Tales of a Thousand and One Nights*,” an Arabian collection of fantastic narratives, and the Persian heroic poetry of Ferdusi, who has been called at one time the Homer, at another the Ariosto of the East.

The elder poetry of the Arabs before Mahomet, consisted, so far as we know, of lyrical heroic songs, which, without making use of any peculiar mythology, simply celebrated warlike deeds, or the feelings of love—generally the fame of some individual hero and his ancestry. The spirit of pedigree formed almost the soul of the inspiration, and all the enthusiasm and zeal of the poet’s imagination were

exerted for the purposes of extolling the achievements of some one race, and undervaluing those of its rivals. And this is done with the same profusion of moral maxims and fanciful conceits which was so much in fashion all over the East. But in this old Arabian poetry there is to be found no peculiar mythology, no such world of fiction concerning gods, and heroes, and spirits, and the mighty struggles of the wonderful powers of nature, as is to be found either among the Greeks or the Persians, or in the poetical theology of the northern Scalds. Their poetry, moreover, is so very local, that, so far from being capable of being transplanted into other regions, in order to understand it perfectly, we ought to become profoundly versant in all the genealogies of the Arabs. In its want of any peculiar mythology, and in the circumstance of its being entirely dedicated to the fame, traditions, relations, and opinions of a few particular families of Arabian nobility, this Arabic poetry bears a great resemblance to the Ossianic. There is, however, this great difference, that in the Ossianic poems there prevails that tone of lamentation which might be supposed to be most in harmony with the feelings of a vanquished, depressed, and almost expiring people—or, if we prefer another explanation, of a people inhabiting the desolate borders of the Northern Ocean, and saddened by the cold mists and vapours of that dreary region. In the Arabian songs, on the other hand, there breathes such a spirit of joy, pride, and valour, as might suit a victorious nation and a burning climate. The hostile tribes are here spoken of not with sorrows and lamentations, but scorn and hatred. The great disadvantage of such poetry consists in its locality; it is an heirloom, and cannot pass from its seat, while, on the contrary, the fictions of a more mythological system of legends are easily transmitted from one people to another, and find many points of resemblance and coincidence among every nation which is so fortunate as to have any similar possessions.

To show how far a poetical mythology was removed from

the spirit of the ancient Arabs, I need only refer you to a well-known incident in the life of Mahomet. It seems that an Arab brought to Mecca the Persian heroic histories of *Iskendar*,\* and some other of the heroes of ancient days. These were received with much interest, being something altogether *new and unknown*. But Mahomet put a stop to the progress they were making, in the fear that his own poetry and his own purposes might be injured by their popularity.

That the Arabs, however, contracted during the subsistence of their Asiatic empire, a strong passion for the magical personages of the Persian poetry, is evident from the work to which I have already alluded—The Arabian Tales. That many of these very tales, indeed, and in particular such of them as are most filled with wonders and fancies, are not genuine old fictions of Arabian growth, but rather belong to the poetry of Persia, and in part probably to that of India—this has been long since acknowledged by all great orientalists. But if the Arabs, previous to their intercourse with Persia, really possessed any original and cultivated chivalrous poetry of their own, besides those old lyrical “*Tribe songs*” of which I have spoken, that is a circumstance of which the world has as yet seen no proof.

Elves and mandrakes, mountain spirits, mermaids, giants, dwarfs, and dragons, were all known in the northern mythology long before the period of the Crusades. These were not things borrowed, but only traces of the old original identity of the northern and the Persian superstitions. All that the western poetry owed to that of the east, with regard to these particulars, consisted in a certain southern magic, and oriental brilliancy of fancy, with which these familiar forms came about this time to be invested. But the kindred spirit of the two mythologies was manifested by another and a still more important circumstance. The Persian *Book of Heroes*, in which the poet Ferdusi, about the beginning of the eleventh century of our era, collected together all the

\* Alexander the Great.

legends and histories of the Persian kings and warriors, and celebrated them in the purest and most beautiful language of his country, and threw around them a blaze of fancy which has procured for him his name of *The Paradiisic*—this book is deserving of great attention, even when considered merely as a repository of mythological learning. The reign of Dschemschid is represented at the beginning of the poem as having been the golden age of the kingdom of Persia, and of the whole Asiatic world. Dschemschid himself is clothed with all the attributes of wisdom and victory, and appears like a bright image of the Eternal upon the earth. But after many happy centuries, when the Sun of Righteousness becomes darkened, and this best of monarchs falls in the fulness of his glory, the Land of Light becomes exposed to the ravages of its enemies. The contest betwixt Iran and Turan—the Holy Land of Light, and the Wild Region of Darkness—is from this time the centre point of all subsequent fictions. In the victory of the great Feridun over the wicked Zobak, and his later more unfortunate contest with the fiend-like Afrasiab; in the government which this evil spirit establishes, and the darkness with which the whole empire is now invested, till at length, after a long series of adventures, Afrasiab is conquered by King Chosru, the proper historical founder of the Persian kingdom—in all these fictions, however strange and diversified, we can still perceive, under the guise of heroic legends, a perpetual adherence to the old Persian ideas concerning the contest between light and darkness. The same spirit breathes in all their other poems, and the same adherence is every where perceptible. Now there is no question that a very similar set of ideas, respecting the contest of light and darkness, (ideas to which, let it be remembered, the Greeks had nothing parallel,) were extremely prevalent in Europe during the middle ages; I might almost say that they were the ruling ideas there, from the moment when the influence of the poetry and allegories of the Scriptures began to be felt. The only differ-



ence between the Christian and the Persian systems, with regard to the perpetual contest between light and darkness, consists in this, that in the former, the good Deity is lifted high above all competition with his enemy; while in the latter, the good and the evil principles are represented as being originally distinct and independent powers. But all this lies in a higher region; the distinction is just and great, but it is, after all, merely metaphysical. Christianity recognises in the world of the senses and in the world of spirits, in nature and in man, the perpetual opposition of the good and the evil, the unceasing struggle between light and darkness—and this forms the true essence of all the maxims, emblems, and allegories of our religion. We may adopt what opinion we will concerning the origin of all these resemblances—we may view them either as produced by the general identity of human reason, or as the result of simple and unquestioning imitation; it is evident, that from whatever source the coincidence arose, it must have naturally given rise to a kindred set of imaginations and opinions, and to a kindred spirit of poetry in the two peoples among whom it was found.

The later romantic poems of the Persians, such as *Meinun* and *Leila*, *Chosru* and *Schirin*, belong to a species of composition altogether unknown among the ancients, and have a strong resemblance to our European poems of love and chivalry in the middle ages. Yet the flowery and fantastic character of the oriental imagination has, of course, kept them very far asunder from any European writings, to say nothing of the still more important difference occasioned by the mode in which love and every thing like moral feeling are treated by men brought up in the customs of the East.

If we compare the old French tales and *fabliaux* with the Arabian tales, we shall have no difficulty in perceiving that the greater part of these fictions had been brought from the East into Europe, in a great measure, it is probable, by the oral narratives of the Crusaders. The small variations which have been introduced, and the colouring of European

manners which has so carefully been thrown over them, cannot conceal the identity of the inventions. At the same time, it is by no means unlikely, that there was a reaction in the case, and that in those days of unexampled intercourse between the East and the West, many European *novels* may have found their way to the professional story-tellers of the orientals. But there is no evidence that we ever borrowed any entire heroic fictions from oriental sources; even the fabulous history of Alexander, although the adventures of the Macedonian form the subject of one of the best of the Persian romances, was not derived to us from that quarter, but from a Greek book of popular legends; and the clothing of chivalrous manners, with which the fiction was afterwards invested, belonged exclusively to ourselves. Something similar occurred in regard to our old legends of the wars of Troy: we derived, in like manner, our ideas concerning the events of that period, not from the great poets of antiquity, but from another popular book of the same class. Our own age, which is so rich in all historical knowledge, and which holds the first place in every species of elaborate imitation, may indeed look down with great contempt on such rude and childish attempts as these poems which represent the siege of Troy, and other matters of antiquity, under the disguise of chivalrous manners. That dark age, nevertheless, however great may have been its inferiority to our own time in every other respect, was certainly not without some advantage over us in regard to its comprehension of the character, although not of the costume, of the earlier ages of antiquity. The middle age was the heroic age of Christendom, and in the heroic legends of the Greeks, there is much that may recall, even to us, the manners of chivalry. Tancred and Richard, surrounded with their minstrels and troubadours, stood, in many respects, in a much nearer relation to Hector and Achilles, and the Trojan rhapsodists, than the field-mmarshals and poets of a later and more cultivated generation. The achievements of Alexander were made the favourite theme

of the romancers, merely because they, of all historical incidents, even without fictitious embellishment, bear the greatest resemblance to heroic traditions, and because the marvellous which they contain is above all the true wonders of other conquerors—akin to that marvellous which is the delight of poets.

But the approximation of East and West was not the only approximation caused by the Crusades. The nations of the West themselves were brought into closer contact with each other than they had ever before experienced, and the fictions of all ages and all countries became inextricably mingled and confounded. This chaotic mixture was in the end the chief cause why all the best, the most touching, and the most peculiar of the European heroic legends dissolved themselves into mere play of fancy, and lost all traces of that historical truth upon which they had originally been established.

With regard to the whole body of romantic fictions still extant, whether connected or unconnected with the great subjects of the poetry of the middle age—even with regard to those which are founded in part on true events, I know only one common standard of criticism. Their value is always so much the higher in proportion as they are more dependent on a historical foundation, more national in their import and character, and more abounding in a free, natural, and unaffected display of imagination—above all, in proportion as they are imbued with the spirit of love. I do not allude merely to a mild, beautifying, and, at the same time, amiable mode of treating every thing that is represented, but rather to that spirit which forms the essential mark of distinction between the fictions of Christendom and all other fictions; which, where a tragical catastrophe is either inseparable from the nature of the subject, or introduced on purpose by the poet, never allows us to close with the single feeling of destruction, oppression, or an inevitable fate—which bids the victim of sorrows and death rise to a higher life with a more glorious presence, and offers to him who is

overcome by earthly enemies or afflictions, the sure prospect of a recompense for all his endurance—a crown of victory in the heavens.

I shall now direct your attention to the further development of the chivalrous poetry, or rather to its speedy corruption and decline among the most illustrious of European nations, down to the time of the Reformation; and I shall begin with Germany, because its literature of this age and species, although not the most rich, is at least the best known. I shall postpone to the end my consideration of the Italian literature of this period, because the spirit of chivalry had at no time much dominion or influence on the other side of the Alps, where a peculiar set of tastes and opinions, all leaning towards the antique, had, even at this early period, begun to obtain an entire supremacy.

The proper awakening and spring of the present language and poetry of the Germans commenced about the time of Frederick the First, in the twelfth century. The first flourishing period was already over at the beginning of the fourteenth century, but a similar sort of poetry continued to be cultivated, and the language continued to be treated after the same manner down to the reign of Maximilian. From that time the prose writing was becoming daily more polished, but the art of versifying was ever on the decline, and the language of poetry retrograding into rudeness and barbarity, down to the commencement of the sixteenth century, when, in consequence of the universal shaking and disturbance of ideas, there took place a total change in the language, which now forms a complete wall of separation between us and the old German taste in language and poetry. Before the time of Barbarossa, that culture, by which Germany was so much distinguished in the days of the Saxon and earliest Frankish emperors, was, nevertheless, rather a Latin culture than a Teutonic. It could scarcely, indeed, have been otherwise in the seat of the Imperial Court itself; for that formed the centre point, by which not only Germany, but the half of Italy, the half Romanic-Lotharingia, and the

almost entirely Romanic Burgundy, were governed and united; it formed also the scene of almost all the political negotiations of Europe; and, in short, the universal language—the Latin—was here an instrument of the nearest and the most indispensable necessity. The same circumstances furnish us with an easy explanation how it happened that some of the emperors themselves, whose affairs must have frequently occasioned them to be long absent from Germany, composed poems in the Romanic dialects—I allude, in particular, to certain princes of the house of Hohenstaufen, some of whom, however, were also poets in their native language. The need of a common language of business was indeed sufficiently felt even within Germany itself; where, in addition to all the native dialects—at that time still extremely separate—(such as the North Dutch and the South Dutch, the Saxon and the Alemannic)—there existed a very considerable population whose language was Slavonic. With regard to the great improvement which appears in the German language during the reign of the first Frederick, I imagine this was produced, not so much by any immediate exertion or patronage of that monarch himself, as by the general circumstances of the time. Germany began about that period to abound, more than ever, in petty princes—sovereigns whose dominions were too insignificant to occupy the whole of their attention, and who therefore were at full leisure to think of procuring for their courts the ornaments of music, poetry, and the arts. These were the real patrons of German literature. It was thus that such assemblages of poets and minstrels were collected around the courts of the landgraves of Thuringia, and still more of the Austrian Babenbergs. I have little doubt, that from some one of these poets, resident in Austria, the *Nibelungen-lied* received that form in which we now see it. Not only by the minuteness of his local knowledge, but also by his partiality for Austrian heroes, are the country and residence of the poet betrayed. He goes out of his way to introduce, by a bold anachronism, the Margrave Rudiger, the favourite hero

of the Austrians. Even the advantageous manner in which Attila is depicted, may be accounted for somewhat in the same way; for many traditions concerning his achievements have been at all times preserved among the Hungarians; and, as these had such a close political connexion with Austria, it may be supposed that Attila came to be considered with some degree of partiality, even among the natives of that country. When the Margrave assures Chriembild, who is desirous of espousing a heathen maiden, that "many Christian knights and lords have their dwelling in the court of Attila," he says nothing but what is perfectly consistent with historical truth. But it is impossible to avoid being a little amused with another passage, in which it is said, that in Attila's court men lived either according to Christian or Pagan customs, as it pleased them; for that the prince knew no rule of favour, but rewarded all men according to the valour of their achievements, and the virtue of their lives. So strange is the perversity of fiction! The warlike and indefatigable Charlemagne we have already seen represented as an indolent and luxurious sultan; and now we see the conquering and cruel Attila transformed into the likeness of a mild, magnanimous, and tolerating monarch.

The last edition of the *Nibelungen-lied* may, I think, be placed, with great probability, in the reign of Leopold the Glorious, the last but one of the princes of the house of Babenberg; and if we are anxious that the author of such a poem should not be left without a name, and insist upon connecting it with that of some well-known genius, it is, I think, highly probable that the poet was no other than Henry Von Ofterdingen, who was a native of Thuringia, but had his residence in Austria.

This work is not only the most excellent of its time in respect of language; its internal structure is also extremely regular and masterly. It has an almost dramatic conclusion; and is divided into six books: these again are subdivided into smaller sections, cantos, or rhapsodies, with a view, it is probable, to oral recitation or singing. The poet

must have adhered with great fidelity to his ancient authorities ; for it is remarkable that he has kept perfectly free of all allusions to the Crusades, although these were the perpetual theme and admiration of all the other poets of his age.

The influence of the Crusades, and of those eastern pilgrimages which were then so prevalent, is, on the contrary, nowhere more conspicuous than in those very unequal compositions which are classed together under the name of the *Helden-buch*.

Of the other classes of chivalrous fictions, that of which Charlemagne was the subject, was at first, indeed, received with great favour among the Germans ; but in the sequel, Arthur and the Round Table had completely the advantage. But were I called upon to give a general opinion concerning the merits and defects of all the old German chivalrous poems, I should have no hesitation in saying, that I consider their chief fault to lie in this—that they are all too much composed in the spirit and tone of the love poems, their predecessors. According to my judgment, that would deserve to be considered as the best chivalrous poem, which, being founded originally on history or tradition, should express so much national feeling, and give to its marvellous so much of the character of power and greatness as might entitle it to be considered as a heroic poem, while, on the other hand, it should preserve in the department of feeling, all that beauty, and tenderness, and love, which formed the excellence of the sentimental poetry of the Troubadours. Whether this height of perfection was in reality ever attained by any of those accomplished masters of romantic poetry, who in subsequent times have appeared among the Italians, the English, and the Germans, I shall not take upon me to decide. The poet who appears to be most near it is Torquato Tasso.

There are still extant several German romances, particularly concerning Tristram, which, in their unbroken melody of versification and softness of feeling, are entirely similar to the old poetry of Provence. But of all the German poets of



that time, by far the most accomplished master of his art was Wolfram von Eschenbach : he has written the histories of the Round Table in a manner superior to any other poet of any country in Europe, and has seized in particular, with the highest success, the idea of that doubly allegorical method of treating them, to which I have above alluded. His hero is at once the type of spiritual warfare, and the ideal of a Templar. In his own days, the fame of Wolfram was as great in Germany, as that of Dante was in Italy; and, indeed, he bears no small resemblance to that illustrious poet, both in his propensity to allegories, and in his love of displaying, with some little pedantry, what was in those times a greater rarity than genius itself—his extensive erudition. In respect of his leaning towards an almost oriental fulness of fancy in his descriptive parts, he bears perhaps more resemblance to Ariosto than to any other poet. It is with old poems, as with old pictures and statues; when these are first dug up from some dungeon of concealment, and seen all covered over with the rust and filth of ages, it is not easy to perceive at one view the real excellence which they possess. To comprehend their true merits we must wait till they are cleaned, and arranged, and inspected at our leisure.

Although I have mentioned that the poetry of Wolfram Von Eschenbach is in some respect akin to Dante and Ariosto, I am yet far from admiring the custom of those who are perpetually tracing resemblances between the poets of different countries and ages. These resemblances are in general either insignificant or imaginary, for every true poet is a being by himself. If we must compare the poems of that age to something, let it be, not to the poems of other times, but to the other works of art which were produced in their own time, and in their own country. They resemble, in the sublimity of that solitary idea, which lies at the bottom of them all, and also in that fulness of ornament which characterises their execution, those monuments of the Gothic architecture which we still survey with a mixed feeling of melancholy, delight, and wonder. Perhaps I

might carry the parallel a little further, and say that the Gothic architecture and the chivalrous poetry have both, in a great measure, remained ideal, and never been brought to perfection in execution. It may be, that the grandeur of the original conception comes upon us with a stronger impulse, from this unfinished work, than it might have done had they been adorned with the last exquisite touches of elegance. The terrible graces are ever conversant with the undefined. The spirit of the middle ages has nowhere so powerfully expressed itself as in those monuments of an architecture whose origin, after all, is unknown to us. I speak of that style of Christian architecture which is characterised by its lofty vaults and arches; its pillars, which have the appearance of being formed out of bundles of reeds; its profusion of ornament; its flowers and leaves—and which is, in all these respects, essentially distinguished from that elder Christian architecture, whose first and best model is to be found in the church of St Sophia in Constantinople. That it was not invented by the Goths, is now admitted on all hands; for the nation of the Goths had passed away long before any existing specimens of it were formed; and we know that it was not an art which took centuries to perfect it. It leapt at once to perfection, and its oldest monuments are the best. Neither is it in any respect Moorish; or if it be so, in a very inconsiderable degree; for we have many true old Moorish buildings both in Sicily and in Spain, and these are all marked by a character quite peculiar to themselves. And with regard to the specimens of Gothic architecture which are to be found in the East, these are all, beyond any doubt, of European origin, and exist only in cities and churches which formerly belonged to the Knights of the Temple and of St John. The most flourishing period of this architecture was in the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. Its chief seat was originally in Germany, and German artists constructed, to the admiration of all Italy, the great cathedral of Milan. But it was by no means confined to Germany and the Ger-

man Netherlands ; it flourished, on the contrary, with equal success in England, and in the northern parts of France. Who was the first inventor of it is entirely unknown ; I doubt, indeed, very much whether it was ever brought to its perfection by any one great architect ; for, in that case, it is difficult to believe that his name could have been utterly forgotten. I am rather of their opinion, who conceive that this system of architecture was perfected and diffused over all Europe by a small society of artists, who were very closely connected with each other. But whoever might be the builders, this much is certain, that they were not mere heapers together of stones, but had all thoughts which they meant to embody in their labours. Let a building be ever so beautiful, if it be destitute of *meaning*, it cannot belong to the fine arts. The proper display of purpose, the immediate expression of feeling, is indeed denied to this oldest and most sublime of all the arts ; it must excite the feelings through the medium of thought, but perhaps the feelings which it does excite are, on that account, only so much the more powerful. All architecture is symbolical, but none so much so as the Christian architecture of the middle age. The first and the greatest of its objects is to express the elevation of holy thoughts, the loftiness of meditation set free from earth, and proceeding unfettered to the heavens. It is this which stamps itself at once on the spirit of the beholder, however little he may himself be capable of analysing his feelings, when he gazes on these far-stretching columns and airy domes. But this is not all ; every part of the structure is as symbolical as the whole, and of this we can perceive many traces in all the writings of the times. The altar is directed towards the rising of the sun, and the three great entrances are meant to express the conflux of worshippers from all the regions of the earth. Three towers express the Christian mystery of the triune Godhead. The choir rises like a temple within a temple, with redoubled loftiness. The shape of the cross is in common with the Christian churches even of the earlier times. The round

arch was adopted in the earlier Christian architecture, but laid aside on account of the superior gracefulness supposed to result from the crossing of four arches. The rose is the essential part of all the ornament of this architecture; even the shape of the windows, doors, and towers may be traced to it, as well as all the accompanying decoration of flowers and leaves. When we view the whole structure, from the crypt to the choir, it is impossible to resist the idea of earthly death leading only to the fulness, the freedom, the solemn glories of eternity.

I have said this much merely to point out in passing, how widely they err who despise indiscriminately the works and the spirit of the middle ages. They who do so are in general little acquainted with the works, and altogether incapable of comprehending the spirit of a period so remote from their own.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the tendency of the Germans was chiefly to moral didactic poems, partly of allegorical, partly of satirical, import. Of this the fable book of *Reineke Fucks*, may be cited as an example; and in truth, if we would see a clear and precise picture of the course of human affairs in those ages, I know not any other book from which we may learn so much of all these things as from this. The witty author has contrived, with great adroitness, to let us see that the fox, whose success he represents among the animals, is only the type of that cunning which was, in those days, found to be the true road to preferment, both among knights and burghers. The chivalrous poetry of a former age erred in entirely departing from history, and becoming a mere display of imagination; the poets now ran into the opposite extreme, and composed regular chronicles in rhyme. Thus the two elements of true heroic poetry were given not in conjunction, but in detail. The two last considerable specimens of our elder poetry are to be found in the celebrated romances which were both published, one of them perhaps, in a great measure, composed by the Emperor Maximilian; the one of

these is in prose, the other in verse. Both of these books are valuable on account of the spirit with which they are animated; but the half-allegorical, half-historical, mode of composition then in fashion, was, it is probable, extremely unfavourable to the noble genius of Maximilian—the last of the old Germans.

The spirit of chivalry remained nowhere so long in all its active purity as in France and England, but the chivalrous poetry of those countries became very soon corrupted, and that even before it had time to reach any high degree of perfection in its development. In France it degenerated into long prose romances, which were quite destitute of the spirit of the ancient minstrelsy. In England its fate was more favourable; for although it was reduced to compositions of no great extent, these undoubtedly were well qualified to take fast hold of the mind, and preserve alive the feelings of chivalry in the bosoms of the people. The French, indeed, are not without their old songs and ballads, and many of them are distinguished by great tenderness of feeling; but neither in quality nor in quantity can they, for a moment, be compared with the popular poetry of the English—more particularly of the Scots; they are as much inferior to them as the northern French love poems of a former age were to those of the Provencal Troubadours. Among the original poets of this old French time, Thibault, Count of Champagne and King of Navarre, appears to be entitled to a high place, perhaps to the very first. The fictitious histories of Charlemagne and the Round Table, were first composed in the French language, either after Latin authorities, or from the traditions of the vulgar. But in every department of literature which flourished in France, England also had her share, and to understand this with propriety, we must take into our consideration what was the political situation of France at that period. Provence we must consider altogether by itself; for not only had it a language of its own, but it was also a fee of the empire, belonging to Burgundy; and the flourishing state of Pro-

vencial poetry commenced from the time when Frederick Barbarossa gave its investiture to the Count Berengar. The northern and eastern provinces of France, on the other hand, were under the government of England; and, in truth, the whole chivalry and chivalrous poetry, both of the French and the English, may be said to have belonged, of right, not to them but to the Normans.

Of the first progress of the French language, the celebrated *Roman de la Rose* gives, in spite of all its fame, no very advantageous impression. The French literature of the fourteenth century is indeed extremely poor; but from the romances and what other productions of that period we have in our hands, it appears that the language had at that time a character very inferior in every respect to the contemporary dialects of Spain and Italy. The French language never assumed its proper shape till long afterwards. Nor was the case very different in England, where all the knowledge and genius of Chaucer could not introduce either uniformity into the language, or nature into the feelings of his countrymen. It is probable that the long wars between France and England, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the bloody feuds of York and Lancaster, prevented, in a great measure, the natural progress both of language and poetry in the two countries. That much of the literature of that age has perished, there is every reason to believe; but to judge from what remains, as the riches of the English consisted in ballads, so that of the French consisted in fabliaux and little tales or novels: these were, in a great measure, the fountains from which Boccaccio drew his fictions, and, indeed, they wanted only a style like his to procure for them that honour which is due to the rich imagination of their inventors.

But even in this early age of French literature, it is easy to perceive a strong tendency to the same species of writing— which is the most peculiar and original, and which has since become the richest of all its possessions. I mean those historical memoirs of particular men or times, in

which there is displayed, with so much liveliness, the spirit of social observation, and which in their portraiture of manners, and their minuteness of finishing, bear a considerable resemblance to romance writing. The first of these compositions (which form the most valuable part of French literature) is the work of the faithful servant and friend of St Louis, the Sieur de Joinville.

The literature of Spain possesses a high advantage over that of most other nations, in its historical heroic romance of the Cid. This is exactly that species of poetry which exerts the nearest and the most powerful influence over the national feelings and character of a people. A single work, such as the Cid, is of more real value to a nation than a whole library of books, however abounding in wit or intellect, which are destitute of the spirit of nationality. Although, in the shape in which it now appears, the work was probably produced about the eleventh century, yet the whole body of its inventions belongs to the older period antecedent to the Crusades. There is here no trace of that oriental taste for the wonderful and the fabulous which afterwards became so predominant. It breathes the pure, true-hearted, noble old Castilian spirit, and is, in fact, the true history of the Cid, first arranged and extended into a poetical form, very shortly, it is probable, after the age of that hero himself. I have already taken notice that the heroic poetry and mythology of almost all nations is in its essence tragical and elegaic. But there is another less serious view of the heroic life, which was often represented even by the ancients themselves. Hercules and his bodily strength, and his eating, are drawn in the true colours of comedy, and the wandering adventures and lying stories of Ulysses have been the original of all amusing romances. But, in truth, specimens of this sort of representation are to be found in the histories of almost all great heroes. However powerfully history may represent the hero's superiority in magnanimity, in bravery, and in corporeal strength, it effects its purpose by depicting him not among the poetical obscurities



of a world of wonders, but surrounded by the realities of life ; and it is then that we receive the strongest impression of his power, when we see it exerted in opposition, not to imaginary evils, of which we have little conception, but to the everyday difficulties and troubles of the world, to which we ourselves feel that ordinary men are incapable of offering any resistance. We have many instances of this comic sort of writing in the Spanish Cid ; for example, there is the description of his rather unfair method of raising money to support his war against the Moors, by borrowing from a Jewish usurer, and leaving a chest of old stones and lumber as his pledge ; and the account of the insult offered to his dead body by another of that race, and the terror into which he was thrown by the Cid starting up in his bier, and drawing his sword a span's length out of the scabbard. These are touches of popular humour by no means out of place in a romance founded on popular traditions. But there is a spirit of more delicate irony in those sorrowful lamentations with which Donna Ximena is made to address the King on account of the protracted absence of her husband, as well as in the reply of the monarch. The romances translated into our language by Herder, are much later in date, but still preserve in great purity the character of the ancient fictions. They abound also in a very peculiar simplicity of expression and feeling, which are not so perceptible in the somewhat careless translation of our great critic.

The Spaniards are as rich in ballads as the English and Scotch ; but theirs are possessed of certain peculiar excellencies to which the others have no pretension. They are not only popular ballads, intelligible and clear to the vulgar, they are also true national and heroic poems, which may be read with the highest admiration by the most refined critics. Popular ballads are, in general, a sort of lamentations over an antiquity of greatness more favourable for the poet. But it is always to be regretted when that poetry, whose business it is to keep alive the national feelings of a whole

people, assumes a form which adapts it only for the vulgar. Such poetry has, moreover, this disadvantage, that it is its inevitable fate to become every day more unintelligible even to those for whose use it is formed. In general, however, poems of this sort are to be found in the greatest abundance among nations possessed of truly poetical feelings; whose legends, traditions, and national recollections have been interrupted or mutilated by long protracted civil wars, or by some universal revolution and concussion of opinions.

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## LECTURE IX.

ITALIAN LITERATURE—ALLEGORIZING SPIRIT OF THE MIDDLE AGE—RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO POETRY—DANTE, PETRARCHA, AND BOCCACCIO—CHARACTER OF THE ITALIAN ART OF POETRY IN GENERAL—MODERN LATIN POETS, AND THE EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR WRITINGS—MACHIAVELLI—GREAT INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

In the preceding lectures I have endeavoured to present you with successive pictures of the different European nations—the Germans, the French, the English, and the Spaniards—more particularly in regard to their poetry and their intellectual cultivation, down to the sixteenth century. The literature of the Italians has alone been omitted, and that I have purposely left for this place, because I consider it as forming the link of connexion between the poetry of the middle age, and the new literature of these later times; since the sciences, and through them the arts, were, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so remarkably enriched and revived.

The elder poetry of the Italians divides itself into two distinct classes; one founded entirely on the philosophy of the middle ages, of which the greatest example is the allegorical *Comedia* of Dante; the other more nearly approaching to the models of antiquity, and standing in a very intimate

relation with the study of the ancient languages. The two great poets, Petrarch and Boccaccio, were themselves men of learning, who took no inconsiderable share in reviving the sciences and arts of the Greeks and Romans. The spirit of chivalry and chivalric poetry seems at no time to have attained the same sway and influence in Italy, which it exerted in France, Germany, and England. Even Dante at first intended to compose his great poem in Latin; Petrarch talks of the knightly poems and romances with contempt and aversion; and although he has embalmed the very spirit of the middle age in his rich love songs, he seems, at the same time, to have rather followed involuntarily the ruling feelings of his contemporaries, than to have written from any serious apprehension of the true nature and excellence of the modern poetry. He founded, in his own mind, his expectations of poetical fame, not upon those sonnets and canzonets which have immortalised him, but upon the Latin epic poem of Scipio,\* which is now only known and read on account of the reputation of its author. The same wavering between the old Latin and the new Italian methods of thinking, speaking, and composing poetry, is equally evident in the third great writer of the first Italian period—Boccaccio. He endeavoured to embody the hair-splitting fancifulness of the Provencial love-queries and love-cases of conscience, and the amusing fictions of the Norman storytellers, in a style of composition far too serious, too elaborate, and too ornate for his purpose. He has written novels upon the model of Livy and Cicero. Many of his works consist of unsuccessful attempts to interweave the mythology of the ancients into Christian histories, or to express Christian ideas in the language and mythology of the ancients; as, for example, in a chivalric romance, where such affectation appears remarkably out of place, he introduces at all times God the Father, by the name of Jupiter; our Saviour, by that of Apollo; and the Devil, by that of Pluto. In some of his chivalric poems he has chosen the subject, after the fashion

\* Known also by the name of *Africa*.

of the middle age, out of the ancient mythology, with which, indeed, there is no question he was far better acquainted than any of the German or French poets who had preceded him in the same field. In this unfortunate choice he still manifests the same passionate predilection for the antique, and indulges in the same fruitless endeavours to reconcile it with those poetical feelings which are peculiar to the modern world.

The most rich, dignified, and inventive of all the three great old Italian poets was unquestionably Dante; whose work, comprehending within itself the whole science and knowledge of the time, the whole life of the later middle age, the whole personages and events in which the poet personally had interest; and not only all this, but also a complete description of heaven, hell, and purgatory, such as these were then conceived to be, is a production entirely unique, and can be ranked under no class of compositions. It is true, indeed, that many such allegorical poems were composed during the middle age, more particularly in the language of the Provencials; but these have all perished or been forgotten. Dante has towered so high above all his predecessors in this sort of writing, that both they and their works have been completely overshadowed. If we are willing to study the poetry of the middle age without being biassed in favour of any particular theory, and without attending to the rhetorical divisions of the ancient critics, which are mostly altogether inapplicable to it—if we are willing to consider it in a point of view entirely historical, and to judge of it according to no standard but that of its own spirit—we shall find that it naturally divides itself into three species—the chivalric, the amatory, and the allegorical. By this last species I mean, of course, that in which the object and purpose of the whole composition, no less than its external form, is allegorical, as is the case in Dante. The spirit of allegory has here its most peculiar triumph; but its influence is wide-spread and predominant over all the poetry of the middle ages. How often an allegorical spirit and

sense was enclosed, even in the form of a romance of chivalry, I have already hinted, in treating of the German mode of handling the fables of the Round Table and the Graal. The difference consists in this, that in these allegorical romances the hidden sense is wrapped up in a representation of human life and transactions, while in Dante, on the contrary, the representations of human life are only inserted here and there as adventitious pieces of furniture in the artfully divided saloons and galleries of his world-embracing allegory. It appears that this universal tendency to allegory, which was so predominant in all the middle age, and which, in considering all the works of that period, we cannot too much keep in our remembrance, had been in a very great measure encouraged and extended by the influence of the Christian religion.

Whether we consider the Bible in regard to the powerful influence which it has in reality exerted upon the whole literature and poetry of the middle age and of modern times, or view merely the impression which, as a book, and in relation to its exterior form, it was and is calculated to produce upon the language, art, and spirit of composition, we shall find two peculiarities which are, above all, worthy of our attention. The first is simplicity of expression—the total want of all artifice. Although the sacred writings are principally or almost exclusively occupied with God and the internal being of man, their mode of treating these topics is every where lively and distinct; they contain little of what we are accustomed to call metaphysics; they are free from all those distinctions and antitheses, those dead ideas, and empty abstractions, with which the philosophy of every nation, from the Greeks and Indians, down to the modern Europeans, has at all times been disfigured, whenever she has attempted to comprehend and explain, by her own unassisted powers, those highest objects of all reflection, God and man. The hereditary evils of endless bewildering, and of inconsistent and artificial reasoning, have adhered to her even when disclaiming all interference with those high

questions and topics: she has either retreated into the world of sense, or exerted all her powers in the mere confession of her ignorance. The same simplicity and absence of artifice distinguish even the poetical parts of the Scriptures, much as those abound in specimens of the beautiful, and above all of the sublime. If we look, indeed, to the elaborate development and forms of writing, the simplicity of the sacred poesy prevents it from sustaining any sort of comparison with the richness of the Grecian compositions. But on the other hand, in those great works, the utmost perfection of blossom is almost every where followed by the symptoms of decay; and to the highest polish of art there succeeds, not unfrequently, an ambitious and luxuriant taste which delights in superfluous ornament and overloaded artifice. There exist many causes in the imagination of man, in the whole complexion of his perceptions, in the propensities and feelings of his nature, which may abundantly explain this universal appearance in the history of art; many influences which may poison and corrode the bloom of beauty, before yet it is perfectly unfolded, or which may reduce the noble simplicity of expression, after that has been perfectly displayed, to the false artifices of corruption. It is for this reason that even those Christian poets of modern times, who have taken either their subjects or their models from the Scriptures—Dante, Tasso, Milton, and Klopstock—resemble their originals rather by individual traits of sublimity, than by any sustained imitation of the faultless simplicity of the Bible.

A second peculiarity in the outward form and composition of the Scriptures, which has had a very powerful effect upon our language and poetry, is that prevailing spirit of types and symbols so conspicuous not only in the poetical books, but in those also whose texture is entirely didactic or historical. In one point of view the Holy Book may be considered as a national possession of the Hebrews, common in some measure to several other oriental peoples, such as the Arabs and other tribes originally descended from the

same stock with the inhabitants of Judea. The prohibition of sensible images of the Deity might contribute in no inconsiderable degree to foster this propensity among the Hebrews; for the power of imagination being confined in one direction, naturally seeks an outlet in some other. A similar prohibition has produced a similar effect among the modern Mahometans. But even in those parts of the Scriptures, where little or no room is afforded for the introduction of this old oriental species of typical poetry; as, for example, in the Christian books of the Bible, the prevalence of a symbolising spirit is still abundantly apparent. This spirit has deeply implanted, and widely extended, its influence over the whole thoughts and imagination of the Christian peoples. By means of this symbolical spirit, and the consequent propensity to allegory, the Bible has come to exert the same influence upon the poetry and all the imitative arts of the middle age, and very nearly the same upon those of our own more cultivated times, which Homer did among the ancients: it has become the fountain, the rule, and the model of all our images and figures. It is true that in cases where the deeper sense of its symbolical mysteries was mistaken, or where the purpose which the figure had been intended to serve was of a nature less serious and sacred, this spirit has not unfrequently displayed itself in the corrupted form of idle and fantastical allegory; for loaded ornament is at all times of easier attainment than native grace; and the most brilliant display of art is a thing more commonplace than the deep gravity of truth.

In regard to both of the last mentioned peculiarities, had these only been every where felt and understood, the Scriptures might have afforded to Christians a high model of imitation, far more beautiful in itself, and far more universal in its application, than any thing which they could have borrowed from the Greeks. Had the spirit of Christianity thoroughly penetrated us with its enlivening influence, we could not have failed to derive from it, both in our language and in our composition, both in our science and in



our art, a noble and sustained beauty, which is the same thing with truth, and whose influence must have in all respects been alike predominant and enduring. But in and by itself, Christianity is, according to my opinion, no proper subject of poetry; I except lyrical compositions, which are to be considered as direct emanations of feeling. Christianity itself cannot be either philosophy or poetry. It is rather what ought to be the groundwork of all philosophy; for they who philosophise without taking Christianity for their guide, terminate either in doubt and inextricable perplexities, or in the cold and despairing void of unbelief. On the other hand, Christianity is removed far above all poetry; the influence of our sublime faith should indeed be every where around us, but here its ministrations should be felt, not seen; and we should beware of debasing, by familiarity, that which is most worthy of our reverence.

The relation of Christianity to poetry and all the literature of imagination, is one which must be considered with the deepest attention, whenever we would inquire into the comparative relations of the literature of the ancients and that of the moderns, and examine in how far the latter of these is capable of contending with the former, and manifesting in its productions an equal degree of perfection. What should that poetry and that art have been, which had been exclusively occupied, down to the present hour, in representing the faded forms and shadows of that antiquity whose spirit and life are fled, or which should have pretended indeed to employ themselves upon our modern life, but at all times confined themselves to its surface and exterior, without daring to search into that deep point of interest and thought, from whence our meditations and our feelings have derived their peculiarity and their power!

It is no wonder that so many whole ages and nations, and so many illustrious geniuses of Christendom, have striven to honour their religion, and embody its revelations, by consecrating to its exclusive service the poetry of which they were possessed.

The truth of the matter is, as I have already hinted, that the indirect expression of Christian feelings, the indirect influence of the spirit of Christianity upon our poetry, if not the only just and true influence, has, as yet at least, been the surest and the most successful. In this sense it is that we may call the chivalric poetry of the middle age (which, like the Gothic architecture, never attained complete perfection) a truly Christian heroic poetry; for the characteristics which distinguish it from the heroic poetry of all other nations, and of the more remote antiquity, are, in their essence and origin, unquestionably Christian. The spirit, indeed, is that of Gothic antiquity, the fictions and the personages are derived from the pagan legends of the north; but all these are changed and purified by the predominant feeling and the faith of love, which have lent new beauty and sublimity even to the wildest play of the imagination. But so soon as the poet attempts to reveal directly the mysteries of our religion, we perceive that he has made election of a subject which is above the standard of his powers. This much is certain, that no attempt of this kind, however masterly the talents with which it has been conducted, has attained a degree of perfection sufficient altogether to remove this impression. We remark the defect in Dante, the first and oldest of all great Christian poets; and it is no less frequently to be observed in the works of his later followers, Tasso, Milton, and Klopstock. By Dante himself, there is no doubt that heavenly appearances, and holy ecstasies, are described in far more vivid colours, and with more true power of imagination, than by any other Christian poet. But his most zealous admirers must admit, that even in him the poetry and the Christianity are not always perfectly in harmony with each other; and that his work, if it aspire to the name of a manual of doctrine and theology, must found its pretensions not upon its general scope, but upon some particular passages with which it is enriched. Although his genius was thoroughly poetical, and indulged itself with the greatest partiality in the boldest

visions of imagination, it is evident that the prevailing scholastics of the day had exerted a very great power over this remarkable spirit. His singular poem is rich beyond all other example in its representations of human life. By his plan of describing the three great regions of darkness, of purification, and of light, he has found an opportunity of introducing every variety of human character, incident, and fortune ; he has depicted, with equally strong and masterly touches of horror, tenderness, and enthusiasm, every situation in which the human spirit can be placed, beginning with the deepest gloom of hell and despair, and then shading away this blackness into softer sorrows, and illuminating these again with gradually brightening tints of hope, till, on the summit of his picture, he pours the warmest radiance of serenity and joy. Those who are able thoroughly to comprehend his spirit, and to enter into all his views and purposes, cannot fail to discover, in his apparently most miscellaneous poem, the strongest unity and connexion of design. It is difficult to know which are most worthy of admiration, the daring imagination which could first venture to form such a plan, or that phalanx of unparalleled powers which could accompany him steadily through its execution. The chief misfortune is, that neither this harmony of plan, nor this vigour of execution, are very easy to be comprehended, for he that comes properly prepared to the study of Dante, must bring with him stores of science and knowledge of the most various kinds, far beyond what is required from the reader of any other poet. To his own contemporaries, and the immediately following generation, his geography and astronomy must have been far less foreign than they are to us ; his perpetual allusions to the Florentine history must also have been far less obscure, and even the philosophy of the poet was that of the age in which he lived. Yet even then it appears that his work stood in great need of a commentary ; and the truth is, that at no time has the greatest and the most national of all Italian poets ever been much the favourite of his countrymen. After the lapse of several

centuries, his works, like those of a second Homer, have had the honour of being explained and illustrated by a whole academy of literati at the public expense ; yet it is certain that he is very far from having become the Homer of Italy. The power which he possesses (and this is of course, in spite of all obstacles, far from inconsiderable) is founded, not upon any general knowledge or comprehension of his works, but upon the exquisite force of a few single episodes and pictures. There are among the poets of his own nation none who can sustain the most remote comparison with him either in boldness and sublimity of imagination, or in the delineation of character : none have penetrated so deeply into the Italian spirit, or depicted its mysterious workings with so forcible a pencil. The only reproach which we can find against him in regard to these things, is his perpetual Ghibellinism. This term may appear unintelligible, but not to those who are well acquainted with the age of Dante. In those later periods of the middle age, the Ghibelline party were animated by designs which aimed at nothing but the establishment of merely worldly dominion, and conducted every enterprise in which they were engaged with a spirit of pride, haughtiness, and harshness, of which, if we would form an idea, we must study the histories and monuments of the time. Even in the most modern times we have had no want of Ghibellines, men who expect the whole salvation of mankind from dominion founded entirely upon worldly principles, and who are willing altogether to deny the power of that unseen influence, which is, however, sure to make its existence to be felt upon every proper occasion. But these Ghibellines of a more modern and an over refined age, are chiefly characterised by the docility and submissive-ness with which they render themselves up as weak masses, ready to assume any shape which it may please that despotism to impress, whose dignity is increased in their eyes by every new infliction of its oppressiveness. The old Ghibellines of Dante's day were equally ambitious, but in their time pride and heroic strength were more common

things ; and the numbers of rival combatants, and the collisions of great characters, were sufficient to prevent consequences similar to those with which we are now acquainted. Then there existed a terrible anarchy, an universal struggle and ferment of mighty characters and powers, but these had not been followed by that sleep of uniformity and lethargy, which is not only the consequence and the curse, but the ministering opportunity also, and the deadliest instrument of despotism. The Ghibelline harshness appears in Dante in a form noble and dignified ; but, although it may perhaps do no injury to the outward beauty, it certainly mars, in a very considerable degree, the internal charm of his poetry. His chief defect is, in a word, a want of gentle feelings. But these are mere spots upon the sun, and must not diminish our admiration for this greatest of all Italian and of all Christian poets.

I have, in one of my former lectures, indicated the proper situation in which we should view the character of Petrarch, when I took notice of the rich finishing which it was his fortune to bestow upon that love poetry of several different nations which has already passed under our review. His elegant productions belong, in truth, altogether to that class ; and we must compare his writings with the amatory productions of the old Spanish and German poets, before we can judge rightly of his merits, or even discover what was the leading characteristic of his genius. Petrarch is distinguished from the other love poets of the middle age by greater skill in composition, and by a more intellectual and Platonic turn of sentiment. There have not, indeed, been wanting some among his admirers, who have gone so far as to maintain that his Laura was no real mistress, but merely a fanciful personification of loveliness. Unfortunately for this hypothesis, there still exist abundant proofs in the church records, not only that Laura was a real woman, but that she was a wife, and the mother of a very large family. It is true, however, that over and above the praises of this lady, Petrarch has introduced a great deal of matter which

cannot be any thing else than allegorical ; this is often too evident to admit of any sort of doubt, and is, moreover, as I have before observed, perfectly in character with the spirit of all the poetry of the middle ages. As a versifier and as an improver of language, Petrarch is entitled to be considered as one of the very first artists who have ever made use of any Romanic dialect.

Boccaccio was of as much use in polishing the prose as Petrarch in polishing the poetry of his country : the only fault in his composition is a love of long and intricate periods ; from which, indeed, with the single exception of Machiavelli, no great Italian writer is free.

Each of these three Florentine poets—Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, was the discoverer of a new path, the former of a new style of composition. The first was master of Allegorical, the second of Lyrical poetry ; the third was the founder of the Novel and the Romance, and composed for the most part in prose, though many of his best fictions are occasionally adorned by poetry. Each of the three had a host of followers in his own department. But the genius of Dante was one of so very peculiar a cast that he was far from being well-fitted to be a model of imitation ; and the crowds of sonneteers and novelists who followed in the tracks of Petrarch and Boccaccio, were such, that both of these kinds of writing, associated with the ideas of repetition and satiety, soon became wearisome in the extreme. The fifteenth century was already well advanced before the Italians, convinced that by persisting in these species of writing, no further laurels were to be gained, resolved to create for themselves a proper chivalrous poetry, and to desert for ever the Greek mythology and Trojan fable which Boccaccio had introduced into the only productions of this sort with which they had as yet been acquainted. The first predecessor of Ariosto, whose name has become celebrated, was the Florentine Pulci. Of a poet so well acquainted with the ancient writers, and living with and admired by the Medici and their polished courtiers, not a

little might have been expected. But I fear his work itself is not fitted to fulfil these hopes. It is one of those in which sportiveness and wit are introduced for the purpose of enabling the poet to ridicule himself, and thereby induce his readers to overlook the more lightly his want of poetical power, or the want of probability and connexion in the incidents of his fable. In the narrative it is not easy to discover what parts are serious, and what written in the spirit of parody; besides, the wit itself is so purely local and Florentine, that we can make very little of it; so that the work is chiefly valuable as a proof how very little the genius of Italians was imbued by nature with the true feelings of the romantic.

A far more successful attempt was that of Boiardo, the immediate predecessor of Ariosto, whose imperfect poem that masterly genius at first intended only to complete, but which he has since become the chief instrument of throwing into utter oblivion. Ariosto does not receive, among those acquainted with the sources from which he drew, any credit for that invention and extravagant fulness of fancy which we hear very commonly ascribed to him. The whole body of his tales and fictions is to be found in his predecessors, and that too set forth with a power of painting not at all inferior to his. The superiority of Ariosto consists in the inimitable polish, lightness, and grace of his language and versification; and he has besides derived no small advantage from the skilful use which he has made of Homer, Ovid, and some other poets of antiquity.

It is worthy of remark, that the chivalrous poetry of the Italians attained its full perfection, not in Florence, but in Lombardy, where the Gothic style of architecture had also been introduced, and where the style of painting bore considerable resemblance to that of the Germans, or at least was less remote from it than the painting of Florence or of Rome. We need only run over the names of the chief old states of Italy, in order to see how infinitely less prevalent the spirit of chivalry, and its moral, intellectual, and poetical



influences were in that country, than among the other polished nations of the west. In Florence the spirit of the people became, at a very early period, entirely democratic. In Venice the ruling principle was that of commerce; and both manners and tastes had more in common with the orientals and the Greeks than with the Gothic west. In Naples the spirit of chivalry was never, after the Norman period, altogether extinct; but a succession of unfortunate events, the rule of foreign dynasties, frequent changes of government, and various other causes, combined to prevent that state from taking such a part as it should have done in the intellectual cultivation of the north of Italy. In Rome, the centre of ecclesiastical affairs, more attention was bestowed upon those splendid arts of imitation subservient to the ornament of the church, than upon chivalrous poetry. If any national feelings were ever excited among the Romans, they commonly took quite a contrary direction, and evaporated in empty dreams about the re-establishment of the Republic, and the restoration of the city to her ancient glory; a specimen of which we may find in those mad schemes of Rienzi, of which Petrarch himself was both an admirer and a partaker.

These seem to have been the causes which prevented the spirit of chivalry from obtaining any power over the more early poetry of the Italians; a poetry which has attained the greatest perfection of development, and which has become, as it were, a common possession of the whole of cultivated Europe. And such seem to have been the circumstances which may account for that leaning to the antique, and to philosophy, which can be discerned in the national poetry of no contemporary people.

The fifteenth century was in Italy adorned by painting much more than by poetry. The prosperity of this art commenced in this century, and it continued to flourish down till the middle of the next. Next to the revival of ancient learning, the age of the Medici, or of Leo X. has been principally indebted to art for its glory. At a period consider-

ably earlier than this, it is true certain painters of Italy began to make some use of those fragments of ancient art which were continually before their eyes. They learned some notions of accurate drawing, and something of human anatomy, and they could not avoid inhaling along with these some ideas of the beauty of form and the sublimity of expression. But an intimate acquaintance with the antique was very rare, and many of the first and greatest masters were entirely deficient in it. And even among those who understood it the most scientifically, no attempts were ever made at strict imitation of the antique. When that came once to be in fashion, it is singular but true, that painting was already on the decline. In the early stage of its progress, this art had acquired among the Italians a new and distinct character of its own, founded upon the predominance of Christian ideas on the one hand, and that of national partialities on the other. Under the influence of both of these species of inspiration, this art acquired a glory which was at that time unrivalled by the sister art of poetry. What poet of those times can we for a moment compare with Raphael? The poetry was less original than the painting. The restoration of classical learning, and the wide circulation of so many illustrious works heretofore little known, produced their natural effects in giving rise to a strong spirit of imitation. The appearances of this manifested themselves very speedily in a manner by no means happy, among all the European nations, but first of all in Italy. Even the greatest geniuses could not remain entirely free from the unfortunate influence; Camoens and Tasso, the two first of modern epic poets, would, I have no doubt, have unfolded their talents in a manner much more powerful, free, and beautiful, had they been utterly ignorant of Virgil, and written without having before their eyes the necessity of adhering to a precedent. The revival of ancient letters was injurious, in yet another manner, to poetry and to language itself. The fashion of writing, and of writing poetry too, in Latin, became so universal, that it gave rise to

great neglect of the vernacular dialects. Next to Italy, Germany, in which classical studies were immediately embraced with unrivalled ardour, was the greatest sufferer; not a few true and excellent poets were, in consequence of their taste for Latin, lost to their own language and nation. For it was not till long after this time that men became satisfied that the only poetry which has any power over a people, is that composed in its own tongue. Under the Emperor Maximilian, himself a lover of German poetry, and himself a German poet, a crown was publicly bestowed on a poet who wrote in Latin, but no similar distinction fell to the share of those who made use of their mother tongue. Even the plays represented before the court were commonly written in Latin. The evident decline and corruption of our German language, so different from what its early flourishing condition might have led us to expect, have been in general ascribed to the convulsions and civil tumults of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is little doubt that these must have greatly increased the evil; but the corruption of our language is quite apparent in writers who composed previous to the Reformation, and who must indeed have received their education at a time when those alarming events of which I have above spoken, had not even been dreamed of. The truth is, that the primary cause of the evil is to be sought for in that ever-increasing rage for Latinity, which induced all those writers who were capable of improving the living language, to consider it as below them to make use of any other than the dead. In Germany, where no great works had as yet been produced, the effects of this fashion were of course far more injurious than in Italy, where there existed the writings of those three great Florentines, and where the language had, in consequence of their labours, acquired a form and standard from which no succeeding authors could ever very widely depart.

The fault of all this lies by no means on the literature of antiquity, but on the use, or rather on the misuse, to which men applied its treasures. The prodigious extension of

historical science, and, through it, of every other species of knowledge—an introduction to so many fountains of information, and so many glorious monuments of art and refinement—these things constituted in themselves a great and an invaluable good. But we shall be greatly mistaken if we believe that this abundant harvest was unmingled with tares; and our expectations must have been far too sanguine if we had hoped that such a hidden treasure could be discovered, and those that found it be guilty of no absurdities in their first methods of applying it. The spirit of the modern Europeans is much more the same throughout the different centuries of our period, than might at first sight be imagined. Every where I observe the same misdirected passion which leads them to fasten upon every new and great addition to their inheritance of knowledge, as if that alone were worthy of more attention than the whole of their previous possessions—to pursue it with restless avidity, and forget in their admiration of it every thing besides, to apply the new ideas to subjects the most foreign from them, and, in short, to become blind to all but one point;—till after this ferment of extravagance has subsided, things at last find their natural level, and the new takes its place among the old, without attempting any longer to exclude it. Like the revolutions of the political world, those of the world of letters are attended by violent convulsions, and the shattering of venerable institutions, and followed by periods of lethargy, which often go far to destroy the good to which they might otherwise have given birth. In the age of the Crusades, when the Western Europeans were introduced to an acquaintance with the science of the Arabians, and the philosophy of Aristotle, when the different nations of the world were brought into contact with each other after a separation of many centuries, it might have seemed no great excess of enthusiasm to expect that a mighty regeneration of intellect should have been the result of such an era. But it is sufficiently evident, that the effects of all these circumstances upon the spirit of the thirteenth century were insig-

nificant, indeed, when compared with what the most rational might have looked for. Their immediate and most general consequence was a pervading spirit of sectarianism, which at first confined its influence to the barbarous schools of the day, but soon insinuated itself into the church, and through her into the state, and into private life. Among all the suddenly enriched and intellectually fruitful periods of European history, the most brilliant is, perhaps, the fifteenth century. It was then that the systematic use of the compass was adopted; it was then that a long series of painful voyages and unsuccessful attempts was at last crowned with a full discovery of the way to India and America; and it was then that the at once astonished and matured mind of man became acquainted with the true extent and shape of the earth, his habitation; it was at the same period that the hidden stores of ancient literature were laid open, and that, in the art of printing, the most powerful of all instruments, both for preserving and enlarging human knowledge, was invented. Such accumulation of unexampled advantages might well be contemplated with the profoundest feelings of astonishment and admiration. But as I have already hinted, and as I mean yet more fully to illustrate, the old cause of misapplication attached itself to this sudden revelation of wealth, with a pertinacity no less striking than it had on former occasions exhibited. The third universal revolution in the history of science, and the spirit of modern Europe, lies nearer our own times. The prodigious improvements in the mathematics, and, through them, in all branches of natural philosophy, which took place in the seventeenth, and which have been carried on still further in the eighteenth century; the extension of all mechanical knowledge, and the improvements in technical expedients, have been such as to give the direction of human life an almost entirely different appearance. Who can deny that this knowledge is in itself dignified and admirable, and that nothing can be more elevating to the human mind than a consciousness of superiority over the corporeal and sensible

world, so well harmonising with the original destination of our species? Had but this dominion over the external world been united with a correspondent dominion over ourselves—had but those physical and mathematical modes of thinking which now began to exert so powerful an influence not only over intellect, but also over manners, been kept in their proper sphere and station, we should have had no reason to complain. The consequences of these modes of thinking, and of the philosophy to which they have given rise, in regard to religion, morality, political and individual life, have been such, that the common opinion is, I believe, already very much against them, and that in a few years no further difference of opinion respecting their tendency can be expected to exist.

I return to the fifteenth century. I have already mentioned the injury which the exclusive predilection for the literature and language of antiquity did, by checking the progress of improvement both in the vernacular languages of modern Europe, and in the poetry therein embodied. The errors and absurdities of this period should astonish us the less, when we reflect that in truth the whole history of modern intellect consists of little more than a narrative of one continuous contest between the old and foreign—invaluable, in so far as form and knowledge are concerned—and the new, the peculiar, and the national, from which the whole life and spirit of our active and effectual literature and poetry must ever be derived.

I think it extremely probable, that several of the modern Latinists of the fifteenth century, in Italy, were actuated by a real desire of banishing the vulgar dialect, and re-establishing the old language of Rome in its life and activity. The mythology and language of antiquity were not merely applied with great want of taste to new and Christian subjects; the abuse went so far as to deserve the name of impiety itself, for it is certain that many writers conceived it to be vulgar to talk of the Deity in the language of the Bible, and revived the plural “ gods ” of the classics. The

manners and modes of life of antiquity found most zealous imitators among the ecclesiastics of the Christian metropolis; nor were there wanting some who extended their partiality not only to the politics, but to the religion of the old republics. But these errors never led to any serious consequences, and therefore it is no wonder their existence has wellnigh been forgotten. The intimate knowledge of antiquity, and decidedly Roman prejudices of one great writer of this age, Machiavelli, have produced effects much more lasting than the dreams of those more idle enthusiasts. He is the only writer, not merely of Italy, but of modern Europe, who can sustain a comparison in style and skill with the first historians of antiquity. Powerful, simple, and straightforward, like Cæsar, he combines the depth and rich reflection of Tacitus, with a clearness and precision to which that great master was a stranger. He has followed no one writer as his model, but rather seems to be thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of antiquity, and to write as if under the influence of a second nature, with that strength, propriety, and life which are the peculiar characteristics of the ancients. The art of his compositions seems to be quite involuntary; his concern appears to extend no further than the thought. But how are we to judge or to explain the political system of this great genius, which has attained in modern times so unfortunate a predominance? The portrait which he has given of an unprincipled tyrant, set forth as the example and manual of all princes and governments, is justified by some, on the ground that Machiavelli meant only to place before the eyes of the world a representation of the corrupted condition of the age and country in which he lived, leaving such a picture to produce its own natural effects upon the minds of those who might contemplate it. Perhaps it may be better explained by considering, that though Machiavelli was both a politician and a moralist, his true and most essential character was that of a patriot. I believe that his object was to inspire the great princes of Italy with the ambition of giving liberty to his



country ; and that, in his opinion, this was an object which ought to be pursued, even although it should be absolutely necessary to make use of those doubtful, or even immoral means, by which others had effected its degradation and subjection. He thought that the enemies of Italy should be fought with their own arms, and that nothing was unfair which might be of advantage to his country. The shrewdness of his judgment is well exemplified in the short parallel between the French and the Germans, which he has left behind him. With a truly admirable acuteness, he shows that the power of the empire was in his day vastly over-rated, and demonstrates, on the other hand, that the power of the French King was most formidably on the increase. However profound and striking Machiavelli's characteristic of the two nations may be, he cannot be accused of having expressed it with any appearance of flattery. The one nation, on the contrary, are satirised in the most unequivocal terms for faithlessness, vanity, and treachery, which he seems to consider as inseparable from them ; while he reproaches the other with equal bitterness for that perverse love of freedom which, manifesting itself in nothing but disunion and distrust, had already in his time sapped the foundations of their empire, and whose baneful effects have been more openly displayed in the sequel.

His opinions concerning the other nations of Europe were such as the fortunes of Italy, Florence, and himself might well excuse. But the main principle which he has defended, namely, that it is proper to make use of immoral means in order to attain a good end, admits of no complete justification. In truth, the danger to Italy and to the world consisted far less in the iniquitous schemes of a few petty tyrants, than in the wide extension of those pernicious principles upon which these indeed acted, but to which the misdirected intellect of this refined Florentine gave a system and consistency which they had never before possessed.

The chief fault of Machiavelli consists, however, not in his defence of the principle that the end sanctifies the

means, but in this, that he was the first who introduced into modern and Christian Europe the fashion of reasoning and deciding on politics exactly as if Christianity had had no existence, or rather as if there had been no such thing as a Deity or moral justice in the world. Before his day the common faith of Christianity had formed a bond of connexion, and been considered as the fundamental principle of all government among the nations of Europe, and the peoples of Christendom regarded themselves as forming, in some sort, one family. The common opinion among mankind was, that as they themselves ought to serve their God, so it was their duty also to love and obey the princes appointed by heaven to rule over them; and that in this sense the right of kings was divine. All the doctrines of legislature, law, and government, still reposed upon the invisible foundations of the church. Of all these things, of the whole domestic and political arrangements of European life, Machiavelli takes no notice; he is not contented with merely writing like an ancient; his thoughts are all fashioned upon the same model; he is an ancient politician of the most decisive and unhesitating order; he believes that power is the sole measure of right, with a faith that might have been worthy of Rome herself in her most violent days of conquest and usurpation. Justice and truth he considers as mere superfluous ornaments, and has no real respect excepting for intellectual strength and ability. That moral right should make no appearance in his writings is not to be wondered at, since it is his plan to regard men as if they owed no submission to any thing beyond themselves, as if had no connexion with their Maker. As there can be no such thing as individual worth and virtue, so it is quite evident there can be no political justice among those who disbelieve the existence of a Deity. Without that belief, the utmost that can be hoped for is deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and hollowness of heart. When we are impressed with a sense of the existence of God, the whole of our thoughts and principles have acquired a dignity to which we could not

otherwise aspire. The visible is every where dependent upon the unseen ; and as the body is moved and regulated by the soul, so are men, nations, and states, held together by the belief and the reverence of the Godhead. The moment we take away this soul, this internal and universal principle of life, the whole composition is loosened and destroyed ; if we obscure its light and obstruct its influence upon the whole, the individual members of the organic, or of the political body, may still preserve some power of life with them, but this life will be narrow, separate, insignificant, misdirected, and destructive, rather than beneficial : it will form a principle of disunion, not a bond of harmony. When that chain of morality and religion, by which states and nations are connected together, has once fairly been broken, the destructive poisons of darkness, anarchy, and despotism, begin immediately to operate, and vice is ever ready to occupy the deserted station of virtue.

The political disunion and corruptions of Europe, whose influence, in spite of the steady resistance of many excellent and truly Christian princes, has ever been on the increase, cannot indeed be accounted for by the abilities, however great and however misapplied, of any one individual ; the seeds of these evils lay much deeper than this. Still, however, he who devotes his talents to give principle, clearness, and form, to any existing engine of wickedness—he who renders its operations systematic, and its effects consequently more pernicious, is an enemy to mankind ; and in so far, it is impossible to deny that the indignation of posterity has been, in some degree at least, the merited fate of Machiavelli.

The two great discoveries of the fifteenth century, printing and the compass, were attended by several others which have had no inconsiderable influence : such were the use of gunpowder and the manufacture of paper. As inventions, both of these belong to a much earlier period ; but their influence began now with their first application to purposes of practical use. The discoveries of this period, taken collectively, have been sufficient to give a totally new appearance

to human society. The distance by which those nations of antiquity which were acquainted with the use of iron, and possessed, along with this, more or less knowledge of writing and of the finer metals, were separated from those barbarians who had no acquaintance with these means of connexion between man and the earth, between nation and nation, between antiquity and posterity—these first instruments of the refinement and development of our species; this immeasurable distance is scarcely greater than that which separates the periods prior to the invention of printing and the compass, from those which have succeeded.

Even in the history of these inventions we find sufficient proof that the use to which men apply their discoveries is of far greater importance than the discoveries themselves. The compass had long before this time been known to other nations, and yet neither had the old continent been circumnavigated, nor the new discovered. Printing and paper had long before this period been used in China, for the purpose of multiplying gazettes, notices, and visiting-cards, without imparting any principle of activity to the benumbed spirit of the Chinese.

The invention of gunpowder was regarded, even after its use had been universally adopted, as altogether injurious and corrupting. Not only did poets, such as Ariosto, condemn it as an unhallowed invention—the enemy of personal bravery, and the future extirpator of all chivalry; the same outcry was repeated by the gravest generals and statesmen of the times. Yet nothing could be more silly than these complaints; true valour and virtue are always sure to find sufficient room to display themselves. With different manners, and in a new form of war, the modern, even the very latest times, have witnessed examples of devoted heroism well worthy of a place by the side of the most brilliant achievements of antiquity, or of the chivalric age. Yet upon the whole, a discovery which has increased the certainty and rapidity of the destructive influences of war, and withal rendered these more systematic, cannot be reckoned among the

most fortunate. In the very first age of its use, gunpowder did more harm than has since been in its power. But for it those robberies of the European nations which followed the first discovery of America, could scarcely have been polluted with so much blood and outrage. In this point of view it would almost seem as if some envious demon had attached to the glorious invention of the compass an engine of evil, by way of turning even the best gifts of humanity to our destruction.

Even in regard to the use of paper, it may be doubted whether the operations of printing, as by its means extended, have really promoted the cause of science and intellect, or conduced to effects of a very opposite description. By means of this cheap material, the art of printing, in itself one of the most glorious and useful, has become prostituted, in times of anarchy and revolution, to the speedy and universal circulation of poisonous tracts and libels—things more destructive to the minds of the uneducated, than ever gunpowder was to the bodies of the undisciplined. Perhaps in making use of a somewhat rarer and more costly material, the press might have remained more true to its proper and original purpose—the preservation of the great monuments of history, art, and science. Instead of this, the cheapness of the materials of printing has introduced a dangerous neglect of the old and genuine monuments of human intellect, and a still more dangerous influx of paltry and superficial compositions, alike hostile to soundness of judgment, and purity of taste—a sea of frothy conceits and noisy dulness, upon which the spirit of the age is tossed hither and thither, not without great and frequent danger of entirely losing sight of the compass of meditation, and the polar star of truth.

## LECTURE X.

A FEW WORDS UPON THE LITERATURE OF THE NORTH AND EAST OF EUROPE—  
UPON THE SCHOLASTIC LEARNING AND GERMAN MYSTICS OF THE MIDDLE AGE.

As yet we have been almost entirely occupied with the literature of those of the modern nations which are settled in the southern and western districts of Europe—the peoples whose dialects are either Teutonic or Romanic, or made up of a mixture of both—the Italians, the French, the Spaniards, and the English. The literature of these nations is beyond all doubt, both from its own nature, and from the widespread influence which it has exerted, by far the most remarkable and important. At the same time, it would have greatly gratified myself, and very much tended to complete what it was my ambition to lay before you—I mean a full—and national view of literature—had I been able to speak at length concerning those other great nations which inhabit the eastern and northern parts of our continent. Every separate and independent nation has the right, if I may so express it, of possessing a literature peculiar to itself; and no barbarism is, in my opinion, so hurtful as that which would oppress the language of a people and a country, or do any thing which tends to exclude them from reaching the higher orders of intellectual cultivation. It is mere prejudice, unworthy of rational and thinking men, which leads us to consider languages that have been neglected, or that are unknown to ourselves, as incapable of being brought to perfection. Some languages, no doubt, there are, which are in a certain degree unfavourable for poetry; a few which may perhaps be almost incompatible with any high exertions of that art: but I believe that there is no language which does not contain within itself the elements of perfect adaptation to all the really useful purposes of life, and to every import-

ant object of scientific writing in prose. Even although the literature of a particular nation may have exerted little influence over neighbouring peoples, the history of that nation's intellectual development, as this stands connected with its public weal, its fortunes, and its history, is, nevertheless, on its own account alone, a very interesting and a very instructive object of contemplation. Yet all I can do in regard to this matter amounts to little more than the expression of my sincere wish that it had been within my power to carry my researches so far, as might have enabled me to lay before you a complete view of European literature. For I am now too old to have any remaining doubt upon my mind, that in the history of literature, exactly as in most other things, very little dependence is to be placed upon the testimonies and the opinions of others respecting matters wherein the ignorance of languages prevents ourselves from being able to verify their statements. I must therefore be satisfied with a few very general reflections on these points at this time, when, in considering the epoch of a new literature and a resurrection of science, it might have seemed most necessary for me to complete my survey by a full examination of every nation and language into which Europe is divided.

The most favourable point of view from which such a general survey could be taken, is certainly the sixteenth century—a period which forms, as it were, an isthmus of connexion between the middle ages and modern times. So far as respects language itself, and the very great influence which that exerts over other peoples, the nations speaking Romanic dialects had at this period a peculiar and very manifest advantage. These dialects are so closely connected with each other, and the mother idiom from which they are all derived, the Latin, at that time the common language of the west, that the acquisition of any one of them is to those acquainted with another, prodigiously more easy than that of any language radically different. It was on this account that even in the middle age itself, and long before the effects of



extended commerce began to be felt, the knowledge of these dialects became far more widely diffused than that of the other northern and eastern languages of Europe. It must, however, be remarked, that Spain remained at all times cut off in some measure from the other districts of Europe, not more by geographical position, politics, constitution, and manners, than by her peculiarity both of language and of intellectual cultivation. That the peculiar language and cultivation of the Spaniards have attained, within their own limits, a very great degree of perfection, has been recognised of late years with more justice than formerly. The only relic of the old prejudice is the notion so prevalent among our critics, that the excellence of the Spanish language and literature has been almost entirely confined to poetry; whereas, as all well acquainted with the subject must know, one great advantage of the Spanish language, and, I might add, of the Spanish national character, consisted in this, that the prose of that language was much more early, and had been much more excellently developed than in any other of the Romanic dialects. The Italian language, with the single exception of Machiavelli, was never applied with much happiness of effect to the purposes of practical and political writing. The attempts at prose composition in the other Romanic dialects were all extremely unsuccessful. The French and English languages first received a formation adapted for practical utility and political eloquence in the seventeenth century; and perhaps the advantage of so applying them has always been confined to the capitals and the higher orders, more than was the case with the Spanish. At a very early period, indeed, the vernacular tongue of Spain was applied, and with the greatest success, to legislation and the most important concerns of social arrangement. Perhaps the very separation of the nation from the rest of Europe may have very much contributed to the early development of its language, which can boast of a very great number of well written histories, and in which a manly vein of eloquence has continued even down

to our own day, full of the most fiery spirit, clear, sharp, and intermingled on proper occasions with an abundance of exquisite wit and irony. In philosophy alone, Spain cannot boast of any names such as those which have appeared in Italy, Germany, England, and some other countries. In that department it must be admitted that she has produced no truly great writer.

The German language has at all times been of more difficult acquisition than any one of the Romanic dialects, and on that account the knowledge of it has always been much more limited. This ignorance of our language among the other nations, has been the origin of not a little contempt for our literature and philosophy. Yet I have no sort of doubt that the place I have assigned to the German nation in this history of literature, is one of which a careful examination of facts will sufficiently manifest the propriety. Although our language is less known than most others, yet all those who inquire with any profoundness of research, either into the history or the language of the southern and western nations, must at all times be compelled to cultivate an acquaintance with the German sources of knowledge; and these will all confess that, along with German political institutions, and German customs of domestic life, a very great portion of the spirit of German thought has also passed into all the other nations of Europe. A thorough knowledge of the middle ages and of their history, is entirely unattainable without a knowledge of the language and literature of the Germans; for the superiority of France and England, during the last two hundred years, has not been more decided than was both the literary and political pre-eminence of Italy and Germany during the whole period of the middle ages. These were, without any doubt, at that time the two first countries in the world. So far as our own country is concerned, it might be sufficient to mention the simple fact, that the art of printing, which was the greatest and the most important instrument of the revival of learning in the fifteenth century, and that mighty revolu-

tion in religion which gave a new form to the whole mind of man in the sixteenth century, were both German in their origin. But without going so far back, the truth is, that if the German language be less happily developed for the purposes of business and political eloquence than the English and the French, this defect is shared by the Italian language, and, like it, atones for the defect in those respects by its peculiar power in poetry. With regard to the higher uses of science, I believe it will be acknowledged by any foreigner acquainted with our books, that our superiority is clear and decisive over every language since the Greek. In the imitative arts, wherein the other polished nations of Europe have very little distinguished themselves, the Germans occupy a place next and near to the Italians. In the modern literature, which has sprung up among the different nations of Europe subsequent to the intellectual convulsions of the sixteenth, and the first part of the seventeenth centuries, the language and mental cultivation of Germany have indeed been late to distinguish themselves. But, at least so far as science, history, and philosophy are concerned, the probability is, that the latest literature will be the richest and the best. The praise of fertility, at least, will not be refused to us during the last half of the eighteenth century—a period in which the literature and intellectual refinement of many other nations was either in a state of pause, of retrogression, or of complete corruption and decay. How defective we still are in many particular departments, we are ourselves extremely well aware; but, in my apprehension, the time is not now at any great distance when an acquaintance with the language and literature of Germany will be looked upon as indispensably necessary to every man of polite education in Europe.

Of all the northern and eastern nations of Europe, the Scandinavian exerted, during the middle ages, the greatest and the most immediate influence over the poetry and thinking of the West. The influence which they had, in the character of wandering Normans, upon Europe, and its

poetry, has already been noticed. They took a great share in the Crusades ; and partook in every thing interesting, either in regard to reason or imagination, which was introduced or created in consequence of those memorable expeditions. The Icelanders traversed every part of Europe as scientific navigators, and collected in every quarter both facts and fictions. The oldest pure fountain of the poetry of the German nations, and the whole middle age, had been preserved in their Edda ; and now they brought back with them, into their northern climate, the Christian and chivalrous poems of the southern Europeans. In many of these—particularly in the heroic poems of the Germans—the resemblance to their own northern sagas and personifications was very remarkable. These acquisitions they now transferred into their own language with peculiar delight and success. Some parts of what they borrowed—every thing which was in its origin heathenish and northern, many particular creations of fancy, and in general all of the wonderful which had been derived from the old theology—they appropriated to themselves with new force, effect, and feeling, on account of their own more intimate knowledge of the Edda. That marvellous, which in the poetry of the southern peoples had been a fleeting and trivial exercise of fancy, a mere idle ornament, acquired in the hands of northern poets a deeper sense, a more affecting truth, and a more important signification. It was thus that the northern versions of the Nibelungen came to possess, in some respects, the advantage even over the German heroic. The Icelanders, in this manner, and the Scandinavians in general, during the middle age, possessed a peculiar chivalrous poetry of their own, destined to experience the same fortune with that of the other nations of Europe—first to be diluted into prose romances, and then to be split into ballads. This last effect was produced in Denmark exactly as in England and Germany, and proceeded in a great measure from the same causes—I mean from that interruption which occurred in the national traditions and recollections in consequence

of the great changes that occurred both in the church and the state. The national poetry was left to be maintained by the common people alone, and was in their hands mutilated, corrupted, and degraded. I do not say this with any intention of stigmatising ballads as entirely useless ; on the contrary, these compositions in England, Scotland, Germany, and Denmark, although every where affording but a faint echo of the nobler poetry which preceded them, are still worthy of great attention both in a historical and in a poetical point of view. The old literature of the Scandinavians was one common to the whole of the north. A great change in its appearance seems to have resulted from the Reformation ; the vernacular historians, both of Denmark and Sweden, are full of complaints concerning the baneful effects produced upon their native languages by that immense influx of High Dutch books which was followed by the general adoption of the tenets of the Saxon Luther. The later literature of Sweden, in particular, is often alleged by the critics of that country as furnishing a melancholy proof, that even a nation the most full of character and feeling is incapable of creating a rich and independent literature, if it continues to show an unceasing predilection for foreign idioms and models. The Danish literature, on the other hand, of these latest years, has been rapidly developing itself at the same time with our own, in a manner quite independent, but yet, as might naturally have been expected, with a greater leaning to the Germans and the English, than to the French.

In looking back, one can scarcely help observing a certain resemblance between the old situation of Scandinavia, before the Reformation, and that of Spain. Each of these countries possessed a high degree of political and intellectual refinement, and each remaining apart, as it were, from the rest of Europe, formed within itself a complete and distinct whole. The Normans, like the Spaniards, had their share in the universally chivalrous spirit of the middle age, which was indeed by no means foreign to their own parti-

cular antiquities. They were also acquainted with the south of Europe by means of travelling. But neither the inhabitants of the Scandinavian, nor those of the Spanish peninsula, were ever engaged in any commerce with any of the other European nations, of so intimate and multifarious a nature as that which connected France with England from the eleventh till the fifteenth, or Italy with Germany from the ninth till the sixteenth century. The literature of the Scandinavians was also entirely directed to subjects of national interest, such as poetry, history, or the like. Like the Spaniards, they paid little attention to higher departments of philosophy; at least no remarkable work of a purely scientific nature was ever produced by them. It is quite evident that four countries alone in the centre of Europe—Italy, Germany, France, and England—as they have occupied the first place in the political history of modern Europe, so in the history of literature also have they distinguished themselves to such a degree, that from the time of the first awakening of the European intellect under Charlemagne, down to the present day, it is scarcely possible to point out a single great incident in the annals of philosophy, a single remarkable discovery, extension, retrogression, or error—or, in short, to fix upon a single great name in the history of philosophy, which does not belong to one of them. The great and distinct differences between the philosophy of one of these nations and that of another, and between that of the same nation in different ages of its history, together with both the causes and the effects of these differences, I shall endeavour to lay before you in due time.

Among the Slavonic nations, Russia possessed, very early in the middle age, a national historian in her vernacular tongue; an invaluable advantage and a sure token of the commencement of national cultivation. That this cultivation had been more universal and extensive in Russia previous to the time of the Mogul devastations, is sufficiently proved by her flourishing commerce, her close connexion

with Constantinople, and many other historical circumstances. But to say nothing of other causes, her subjection to the Greek church was alone sufficient, during the middle age, and is in some measure sufficient even in our own time, to keep Russia politically and intellectually at a distance from the rest of the western world. Of those Slavonic nations which belonged altogether to this part of Europe, the Bohemians already possessed, under their Charles IV., a full and rich literature, a more near acquaintance with which, above all for historical purposes, might be very desirable. From all that we know of it, this literature appears to have followed the paths of history and science much more than that of poetry. That the Polish language, whose fitness for the purposes of poetry has been celebrated of late years, did, even in the early part of the middle age, possess a treasure of national poems, is hinted by several writers, and is extremely probable from the character of the nation. But I myself am not in possession of the means either to verify or to disprove it. Should it, however, turn out that such is not the fact, and that the Slavonic languages and nations of the middle age were entirely destitute of any such rich and peculiar poetry as that with which the nations making use of Germanic and Romanic dialects were endowed—even if this should be so, it may perhaps be no difficult matter to give a very rational account of the phenomenon. The Slavonics, in the *first* place, took either no part at all, or at least a very slight part indeed, in the adventures of the Crusades. *Secondly*, The spirit of chivalry, although not perhaps originally foreign and unknown, attained at no period the same penetrating and commanding power over them as over the other nations of Europe. And *lastly*, It may be that the peculiar theology possessed by the Slavonics before the adoption of Christianity, was less rich and picturesque than the old Gothic system of superstitions, or at least that their heathenish ideas were more speedily and entirely eradicated by the prevalence of the true faith.

There is no doubt that the Hungarians possessed, even in



times of very remote antiquity, a peculiar heroic poetry in their national language. One great and favourite subject of this poetry was the migration and the conquest of the country under The Seven Leaders. It is evident, from many passages in the Hungarian chronicles, that even after the introduction of Christianity these legends of the heathenish time were not entirely forgotten. There is, at least, every reason to think that those writers have actually copied from ancient poems of that sort. One such poem, indeed, a Hungarian scholar, by name Revaj, has rescued from oblivion ; its subject is the arrival of the Madyari in Hungary. But the existence of many such poems might easily be gathered from the perusal of the chronicle of the Royal Secretary, as he is called, Bela—the same person who fills so considerable a place both in the history and jurisprudence of his country. The materials upon which this chronicler wrought were, I have no doubt, historical heroic ballads, which he has translated very diligently into prose, and interspersed with abundance of opinions, and would-be explanations from the cooler coinage of his own brain. But I am far from approving of the severity with which critics in history are accustomed to treat the good secretary. We should value the book for the relics which it embodies, sorely mutilated as these no doubt are, of the heroic legends and poetry of the Madyari ; and not look in it for what it would be absurd enough to expect we should find in any such place—philosophical inquiries into political affairs, or skilful elucidations of historical difficulties. Another theme of the Hungarian poets was Attila, whom they uniformly represented as a king and hero of their own nation. In these chronicles, we find abundant proof that Attila and the Gothic heroes associated with his name in the Nibelungen-lied and the Helden-buch, were equally celebrated in the language of Hungary, and that poems upon these subjects were in existence down to a period comparatively near ourselves. It is probable that the destruction of the whole of this ancient poetry may be referred to the period of Mathias

Corvin, who attempted at once to change his Hungarians into Latins and Italians, the natural consequence of which was to bring into comparative neglect the old legends and poems of the country. The fate which befell Hungary in the fifteenth century would have befallen Germany in the eighteenth, had a certain illustrious monarch of that period, who, like Mathias, thought foreign literature alone worthy of his attention, been possessed of an influence as great and undisputed over Germany, as Corvin had over Hungary. Whatever of the old legends of Hungary and of the monuments of its language and poetry escaped the barbarism of this foreign refinement, fell entirely to the ground during the time of the Turkish invasions. The Hungarians have retained nothing but their predilection for historical heroic poetry. Several great masters of that art have appeared among them during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries ; and now in our own time, there has arisen one more illustrious than any of these, Kisfalud ; who has devoted himself in his mature age to the national legends of his country with the same ardour and feeling which distinguished the amatory poems of his youth.

I close these sketches, these remarks upon the literature and language, more or less known and understood, of the different European peoples, with one general reflection which I have already thrown out upon a previous occasion. Every independent and distinct nation has, as I believe, the right to possess a peculiar literature ; that is, to possess an improved and cultivated national language, for, without that, no degree of intellectual refinement can become truly national and effectual, nay, the greatest, being embodied in a foreign vehicle, cannot fail to be tinged with a certain stain of barbarism. It is indeed a very absurd way of showing our partiality for our own language, to desist from learning any other, or even to deny the advantages which some foreign languages may possess over our own. Besides the ancient languages, there are several of the modern dialects so useful in regard to general cultivation, that what-

ever department a man chooses for himself, he cannot fail to find one or other of them absolutely necessary for his purposes. The external relations of life have, besides, rendered the acquisition of some of them indispensable. The use of a foreign dialect in legislation and in courts of law is at all times distressing, and I might even say unjust; the use of a foreign dialect in diplomacy, and in the social intercourse of polished life, can never fail to produce injurious effects upon the vernacular language. But when the custom of so using a foreign dialect has once been fairly introduced, the evil is, at least for individuals, an irremediable one. It then becomes the duty of the whole cultivated and higher order of society to come forward together, to point out by their influence the proper route between two extremes of entirely neglecting and exclusively studying foreign languages; to give to necessity that which she requires, but never to forget what is due to our country. The care of the national language I consider as at all times a sacred trust, and a most important privilege of the higher orders of society. Every man of education should make it the object of his unceasing concern to preserve his language pure and entire—to speak it, so far as is in his power, in all its beauty and perfection. He should be acquainted generally, not superficially, not only with the political history, but with the language and literature of his country; and so far is the study of foreign languages from being hostile to all this, that without such study, I believe no man can acquire the degree of perspicacity, or the facility of expression necessary for the purposes to which I have alluded. But the use of a foreign dialect in society should certainly be limited to the strictest bound of necessity. The obligation to watch over the language should be most sacred in the eyes of those who stand highest in the society; for the more rank, and wealth, and consequence any individual possesses, the more has the nation a right to expect from this individual that he shall contribute to the utmost of his power to the preservation and cultivation of that which is hers. A nation whose lan-

guage becomes rude and barbarous, must be on the brink of barbarism in regard to every thing else. A nation which allows her language to go to ruin, is parting with the last half of her intellectual independence, and testifies her willingness to cease to exist. The danger is no doubt great when a national language is assailed on the one hand by a systematic plan for its corruption, and on the other by a foolish and affected fashion which encourages, from mere silliness, the use of a foreign dialect. But in such matters as these, the danger ceases to be the moment we are sensible of its existence. In every thing which depends not upon the spirit of a moment, but the perseverance of an age, the victory is always sure to be obtained by the universal and calmly progressive resistance of men of sense.

From this general survey of the different nations of Europe, I return to the thread of my history. The great improvements and discoveries which have given to the science and literature of modern Europe a new form and direction, belong, properly speaking, to the eighteenth century. But that intellectual cultivation which attained its mighty development in the eighteenth, received its shape and form in the sixteenth century, through the Reformation. It was the moving spirit of that event which, both in the one of these periods and in the other, determined the way in which the intellectual cultivation should run, the end it should strive to reach, and the limits within which it should be confined. In both periods the apparent subjects of dispute and tumult were matters, at first sight, little connected either with refinement or with literature; for these were either politics, and the ecclesiastical constitution, the being, the limits, and the exertions of spiritual powers, or those mysteries of religion which lie too deep even for the investigation of philosophers themselves. The Reformation, nevertheless, although these were apparently its objects, had the effect of shaking and altering the whole of Europe, and thus came to exert a very great and multifarious, although certainly an indirect influence over literature and over all

the exertions of intellect in whatever way applied. This influence was in part salutary, in part hurtful. To the first I refer the universal extension of the study of Greek, and the other ancient languages, which now came to be considered as indispensable in a religious point of view, and which began therefore to be cultivated, if not more zealously, at least far more universally, in all the Protestant countries—in Holland, in England, and in the north of Germany. The love for the ancient languages had in Germany, and above all in Italy, been such, even before the Reformation, that so far as these countries are concerned, its influence was merely an additional circumstance in their favour. The contests and rivalries of the contending parties were perhaps productive of little effect in relation to the true objects of their researches; for religion is a matter of faith and feeling rather than of disputation and dialectic combating. In a political point of view, the effect of the great ferment has been far more happy; but perhaps even here the effect has been an indirect rather than an immediate advantage, and that, too, discovered, like most other advantageous consequences of the Reformation, not instantly, (as its evil effects were,) but long after, when the agitated elements had had leisure to subside into a calm. The effects upon the imitative arts were pernicious. I do not allude to those operations of active destruction which took place here and there, but rather to that more general evil which resulted from the arts being compelled to depart from their natural and original destination. The civil disturbances and wars which ensued, were in like manner, as usually happens, more destructive to the arts than to literature. It was probably in consequence of these events, that the national painting of Germany, which had begun to flourish with so much success in the hands of Albert Durer, Lucas Cranach, and Holbein, stopped before it had time to reach the eminence it was fitted to attain. These great men were themselves contemporaries of the Reformation, but they had been educated in the time before it took place, and in their art they

found no followers. In the Protestant Netherlands painting became devoted to subjects of lesser importance; and so employed, in spite of the utmost perfection in execution, it could never approach the superior power and effect of the old painting, which had been devoted to religion. In general there was produced a most unfortunate rupture between men and their ancestors; and these, not contented with laying aside the contested points of faith or ecclesiastical government, thought it necessary to forget the whole middle age, and to despise the history, the art, and the poetry with which its recollections were so intimately blended and united. The loss to Germany was peculiarly unfortunate. Such a break and throwing aside of the intellectual inheritance of our forefathers could scarcely indeed fail to be produced by a revolution so sudden and so entire. But now that all the causes of the bigotry have ceased to operate with any violence, it is time surely that we lay it aside, that we begin to think liberally, and no longer to indulge in any contempt either of the art or the refinement of the middle ages. The principle, that the Reformation was productive of liberty of thought, is one that can scarcely be defended now. The universal freedom, the full emancipation of intellect, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, does not at least belong to the immediate consequences of the Reformation; it was produced by a great mixture of causes over and above the Reformation, and after all there is not a little reason to doubt whether the unfettered license it has introduced has been so salutary and praiseworthy as we have sometimes heard. The near and immediate effect of the Reformation upon philosophy and freedom of thinking, was one of constraint. The idea of such liberality as that which prevailed in Italy and Germany under the Medici, Leo X., and Maximilian, was a thing entirely unknown among the zealous Protestants of the sixteenth and of the first part of the seventeenth century. The establishment of such tyranny, political and intellectual, as that of a Henry VIII., of a Philip II., or of a

Cromwell, was only rendered possible by means of the Reformation. He who is placed at the head of a new party, and a great revolution, at once religious and political, possesses a power so unlimited over thought and intellect, that it is at least entirely the effect of his own choice if he does not abuse it. To the defenders of the old faith, on the contrary, under a Philip II., and under several of the French kings, every mean appeared allowable which could contribute to check the further diffusion of the new opinions. Should any one attempt to prove the beneficial tendency of the Reformation by quoting instances of persecution from the times preceding it—such as the burning of John Huss and Jerome of Prague—my answer is, that these cruel enormities were in part at least the effects of political animosity; or if that be not sufficient, that abundance of similar horrors may be found after the Reformation in the history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that, too, on both sides. The first great self-reflecting mind, the first writer of great and active power whom the Protestants possessed after the period of the first ferment, Hugo Grotius himself, living in the freest country then existing, could not escape imprisonment and persecution. On the other hand, the dangerous abuses which some had made of liberty, led to narrow-mindedness and oppression on the part of rulers otherwise well disposed to be liberal. In Italy, in particular, a speedy termination was put to the then rapidly increasing progress of philosophy; insomuch that a fact soon became to be doubted, which seems to me abundantly clear and evident—I mean the natural capacity of that ingenious nation for the higher exertions of intellectual inquiry. The most distinguished philosophical talents possessed by Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, took a turn so unfortunate that they have been almost entirely lost to their country, their doctrines having become adverse not only to the spirit of the Christian church, but to all those principles of moral belief without which there is no safety in the social intercourse of men. In the world of intellect, as well as in



that of politics, the sure consequence of anarchy is despotism, and oppression is again invariably the harbinger of lawlessness. So that there is a perpetual flux and reflux from the one of these extremes to the other, both alike dangerous, unless some third and higher influence intervenes, or the whole bond of constitution is renewed.

When certain panegyrists of the Reformation represent this as having been in itself alone a step forward of the human mind, and of philosophy—a deliverance from error and prejudice—they are just taking for granted the very fact upon which we are at issue. One should think, also, that men might be rendered more cautious in the use of such expressions, when they reflect, that by the example of many great nations—of Spain, of Italy, of Catholic France during the seventeenth century, and of Southern Germany even in these latest times—it can be proved, with little hazard of contradiction, that a very high, nay, that the very highest degree of intellectual cultivation is perfectly compatible with the belief of those doctrines which the friends of Protestantism decry as antiquated prejudices. The admirers of the Reformation should lay less stress upon its consequences; for of these some were, as themselves admit, altogether unhappy, many remote, and assisted by the co-operation of other causes. Besides, the effects are perhaps in no case perfectly decisive as to the nature of the thing itself. The bigoted Catholics on the other hand, who despise the Reformation, and abhor it as altogether irreconcilable with their own religious opinions, should at least recollect that the later, if not the more immediate effects of that mighty convulsion, have been beneficial and salutary. If we survey the history of the world with the feeling of belief—if we are willing to recognise in the fortunes and fates of mankind the interposing hand of Providence, we shall perceive the same spectacle in every direction. Every where we shall see men presented with the happiest opportunities, entreated, as it were, to do good, to know the truth, and to reach the eminence of true greatness and true

excellence; entreated, however, not compelled; for their own co-operation is necessary if they would be what fits the destiny of their nature. Rarely, very rarely, do men make the proper use of the means they are intrusted to employ; often do they pervert them to the most dangerous abuses, and sink even deeper into their ancient errors. Providence is, if we may so speak, ever struggling with the carelessness and the perversity of man: scarcely by our own guilt and blindness have we been plunged into some great and fearful evil, ere the Benefactor of our nature causes unexpected blessings to spring out of the bosom of our merited misfortune—warnings and lessons expressed in deeds and events, furnishing us with ever-returning admonitions to bethink ourselves in earnest, and depart no more from the path of truth.

With the art of poetry Protestantism disclaimed at first any connexion; its effects upon both were injurious and depressing; history and grammar were, in consequence of the Reformation, both studied more accurately, and diffused more extensively; but with philosophy the change of religion stood in the most intimate connexion. But perhaps this may be no improper place for giving a short sketch of the history of philosophy, both before the Reformation, and in the first century after it—I mean, of course, only in so far as philosophy exerted a real influence upon the universal intellect of the time.

I have already called your attention to the most remarkable of those philosophical geniuses produced by England, Italy, and France, in the earlier period previous to the twelfth century. Germany too was fruitful in such productions, and may boast of an almost uninterrupted series of them from the reign of Charlemagne down to the Reformation, and even after that event. Upon the whole, barrenness is, of all reproaches, the one least deserved by the modern Europeans, even by those of the middle age. If we must blame them, it should rather be for the mixture of useless and unprofitable weeds which they have allowed to

spring up along with their good grain, more particularly when any new field has been added to the territories of science. It was thus that, along with the mathematical, chemical, and medical learning which they borrowed from the Arabians, they admitted from the same quarter the trash of astrology and alchemy; and it was thus that, with the knowledge of Aristotle, whom they considered as the perfection of all merely human wisdom, there grew up a whole wilderness of dialectical hair-splittings and sophistical artifices, of pretty nearly the same nature with those which had formerly infested the Greeks. The best thing in the philosophy of Aristotle is the spirit of criticism. But to perceive or comprehend this, required an enlarged and complete knowledge of antiquity, such as was in those days quite impossible, and as is, even in our own time, extremely rare. The critical spirit of Aristotle deserted him in the region of metaphysics alone, because there the only two guides which he followed—reason and experience—were incapable of leading him aright. From an absurd reliance on those metaphysics, which even in the work of the great master himself are unintelligible, arose that system of philosophy which has received the name of the Scholastic. The evil occasioned by this was, however, abundantly atoned for by the good effects of the study of the practical physics of Aristotle, particularly after the time of Albertus Magnus. That the morals of Aristotle were an important acquisition to the middle ages I can by no means allow; the value of that system to us consists chiefly in the illustration it affords of the manners, the domestic life, and the political institutions of the Greeks. Long before the works of Aristotle began to be studied, our ancestors possessed a system of ethics incomparably purer and better than his in the Bible; and their acquaintance with him only tempted them to deform that superior system by ingrafting upon it a great variety of superfluous niceties and classifications. Of the very pernicious effect which the Aristotelic system is capable of producing even upon a very refined and learned age, Spain can

supply us with one very striking example. In the sixteenth century, when the great question of the treatment of the Americans was agitated, the minds of many of her best reasoners, and among others of one who, in every other respect, was a very excellent man, Sapoveda, were so infected with those notions of slavery so prevalent among the Greek authors, that, principally by their means, measures were adopted in the national councils equally repugnant to the principles of natural justice, and to the express precepts of Christianity.

We are not, however, to suppose that all the evils of the scholastic system were occasioned entirely by the study of Aristotle. At first the opposition of the church to his doctrines was greatly enhanced on account of a crowd of most dangerous doctrines and opinions which began to come into fashion about the same time with those properly belonging to his philosophy. This much, nevertheless, must be admitted, that from the history of the Arabs, no less than from that of the middle ages in Europe and of the sixteenth century, there is reason to believe, that the two notions of conceiving the Deity to be a mere animating principle of the universe, and of denying the personal immortality of the soul, appear to be, if not necessarily, at least were generally connected with a zealous adoption of Aristotelianism. However this might have been, the impulse of the age became in a short time irresistible, and the dominion of Aristotle could no longer be avoided. Christian philosophers, alike desirous of supporting the cause of truth, and of extending the limits of knowledge, then applied themselves to the study of Aristotle, in the hope of at least turning aside the stream which they found it was now impossible to turn back. It is no easy matter to form a proper general judgment concerning these men who, at least in so far as talents were concerned, deserved the very highest estimation. The false and scholastic turn of their philosophy was the natural consequence of the ancient sophistry, (bequeathed as that was, and too inconsiderately accepted,) of the original defectiveness of the

Aristotelic metaphysics, and the Arabian commentaries,—above all, of that spirit of sect which was the animating principle of the age, and from which (so enticing were its allurements) even they who were most aware of its existence could seldom keep themselves entirely free. This spirit of sect and division was nourished and inflamed very powerfully by the universities, wherein many thousands of stripplings were yearly educated in the very atmosphere of contention, and taught to consider the violence of disputation as the highest eminence of human merit. For the best things which the philosophers of the middle ages possessed, they were indebted either to Christianity, which at all times secured them from falling into the most dangerous species of errors, and to the greatness of their own genius and understanding. But after all, there can be no greater mistake than to suppose that what we commonly understand by the name of scholastic, that is, the unprofitable waste of intellect in empty ideas and unintelligible formulas, was an error peculiar to the middle ages. The evil had already displayed itself to excess in the philosophy of the Greeks, and that, too, in the most flourishing age of its cultivation. The same thing may be said of modern times; for not from Germany alone, but from France and England also, there could be no difficulty in producing abundance of examples, very often in the persons of those very men who have declaimed the most loudly against the scholastic philosophy and against the Stagyrice. It is only requisite that we look to the essence of the evil, and that we do not allow ourselves to hold sophistry to be less dangerous, merely because it presents itself in a form of greater skill and elegance.

The prevalence of empty ideas and meaningless words is a malady incident to human reason, which never fails to make its appearance the moment we desert the path of truth; in my opinion, its most pernicious influences are exerted in active life by means of the distorted artifices of eloquence, and not in the retired and formal exercises of the

schools. In every case, however, the spirit of sect is its inevitable consequence.

The philosophy of the middle age may be said to have been defective, chiefly because it was not thoroughly Christian : because the intellect, knowledge, and ideas of mankind, were not sufficiently penetrated with the spirit of our religion. In the philosophy of the modern Europeans, which these inherited as a legacy from the ancients, there are two great masters to be followed, and each is calculated to lead those that put confidence in his direction into a particular train of errors. On the one hand, there is the defect to which I have already alluded, that over rationalism to which men are led by Aristotle and the ancient dialectics ; the other is the Platonic and visionary system of error into which men are very apt to fall, whenever thought and faith overshoot those limits which are necessary to the right exertion of every human faculty. From this proceeded the second species of philosophy common in the middle age, the mystic. So long as men confined themselves to the subjects of religious feeling and conscience, there is no doubt that this philosophy was not merely an excusable, but a very excellent guide. But its defectiveness was very apparent when they attempted to apply it to matters of science. Platonism, connected as it was with a host of oriental mysteries, public and concealed, gave the fancy too much room for play, and in natural science in particular, the adoption of its tenets was almost always coupled with a belief in astrology, and a leaning to the study of magic. This was above all common in Germany. I may be the more easily excused for saying so, since, in our own days, there have occurred many symptoms of a tendency to recur to these errors. As in former times, pious men began the histories of their lives with a prayer to God, or a religious sentiment or aspiration, so it has once more come in fashion to commence memoirs with a scheme of nativity, or some astrological conjecture.\* The speculations of natural philo-

\* Schlegel alludes to the first paragraph of Göethe's Life.

sophers may certainly select, without offence, any subjects which promise either knowledge or amusement to those that pursue them. I am not disposed to throw entire ridicule even upon the study of secret influences, when it is kept in its proper place. But the application of such pursuits to the business of active life, and the belief that human destinies can, in any degree, be regulated by the position of the stars, are absurdities which deserve to be treated with something more severe than ridicule itself. The pernicious effect of a firm belief in the potency of these mysterious influences, the total ruin of all moral and religious principle, which such a belief brings along with it, has already been depicted with terrible vigour by the tragic pencil of Schiller in his *Wallenstein*. Easy as is the abuse, and dangerous the partaking of such things, they have been dealt in by neither few nor inconsiderable persons. An Albertus Magnus—a mathematician of the fifteenth century, such as Nicolas of Cusa—a pious bishop, such as Trithemius—the first of all orientalists, Reuchlin himself, confessed, without scruple, their hankering after the possession of secrets which can never be revealed to man. It would be as unjust as foolish to deny the merits of these great men, to call in question their genius, their knowledge, or their piety, on account of their addiction to follies which, in our own day, we have seen so nearly revived. But all the dabblers in the occult sciences were not men of this kind; the facility with which such pursuits could be associated with the most profligate schemes of quackery and charlatanry, is too apparent in the history of the times. It may be sufficient for my purpose to mention the name of Agrippa. Even Paracelsus himself was not free from some such errors. But Germany possessed, in these early days, many mystic philosophers, who devoted themselves entirely to the feelings of religion. No modern language was so soon applied to the purposes of the higher philosophy, and to spiritual subjects, as ours.

There were, from the thirteenth century down to the time



of the Reformation, very many writers of this kind, both in High and Lower Dutch. They were connected with each other, and formed a sort of school, and called themselves the servants of wisdom, or the heavenly Sophia, understanding by this name that divine and sublime truth which was the object of their ambition, and to their love of which they willingly sacrificed their lives. I shall, out of a great number, mention only one whose works were of great importance in the formation of our language. This is the preacher, or the philosopher, Tauler, who received, long after the Reformation, the emulous praises both of Catholics and Protestants, but who has at last yielded to the common destiny of oblivion. The scholars of Alsace, who, although their country has long been politically annexed to France, still show, by the diligence and depth of their inquiries into our history and our language, that they are determined by no means to part with their character of Germans, have had the merit, in our own time, of recalling the public attention to this forgotten sage, and the very high importance of his works, at least so far as language is concerned. If we compare his writings with those upon similar subjects composed in Luther's time, or even a century later, we shall find their superiority as manifest as is that of the harmonious love poems of the thirteenth century, and the Nibelungen-lied over the rude verses of the sixteenth century. In this respect, also, the elder time was by no means the more rude ; but, as its spirit was better, so its language also was purer than that of the age which came after.

When critics reproach our nation with a tendency to mysticism, they are probably not aware how old the failing is. It would be easy to show that we have been equally guilty of it ever since the time of Charlemagne. But whether the reproach be really well founded, or whether that which is the subject of it be not rather deserving of praise than of blame, I shall not take upon me at the present time to decide.

In the philosophy of the middle age, as in that of the

more modern times, the strong and distinct influence of national character is abundantly visible. In the older, exactly as in the later times, France and England were distinguished for the production of great thinkers, great doubters, and great sophists. The Italians were chiefly remarkable for their strict adherence to the truths of our religion ; but they also, like the Germans, had a propensity to the higher, the more spiritual, and the more mystical kind of philosophy. The leaning to Platonism may be traced even in their poets. In one word, that philosophy of experience and reason, whose greatest master among the ancients was Aristotle, had the greatest number of followers during the middle ages, as well as more lately, in France and England. In this respect, these two nations, in spite of their political rivalry, coincide at bottom in their views and opinions, much more closely than at first sight might be imagined. A propensity to the other and more Platonic species of philosophy has, on the other hand, distinguished both the Italians and the Germans, the one the most remarkable nation for love of art, and the other for depth of feeling ; insomuch, that widely different as they are in origin, language, and manners, they have at all times been connected together by a certain sympathy and community of attachments.

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## LECTURE XI.

GENERAL REMARKS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE TIMES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING AND FOLLOWING THE REFORMATION—POETRY OF THE CATHOLIC NATIONS, THE SPANIARDS, THE PORTUGUESE, AND THE ITALIANS — GARCILASO, ERCILLA, CAMOENS, TASSO, GUARINI, MARINO, AND CERVANTES.

THE state of universal thought, and the progress of philosophy, immediately before the Reformation, and in the first century after it, formed the last subjects of our attention.

The real result of our inquiries may be comprised in the following general remarks :—

Throughout the whole of Europe, before the restoration of ancient learning and the reformation in religion, that empty logical system of words, which went by the name of Aristotle, was adopted almost universally by the learned ; and, without any exception whatever, by all the public seminaries of instruction. In Germany, however, and afterwards in Italy, there sprung up during the fifteenth century, by the side of this dead philosophy of words, another and a higher species of philosophy, which coincided in part with the system of Plato, and in part with that of the Orientals. In particular things, there is no doubt that this new system led the way to error ; but upon the whole, at least its principles were just, and, at all events, it was both richer in import and more profound in its views than the other. We may see the proof of its superiority even in the manner wherein it was studied, and in the persons of those by whom it was adopted. The seat of its sway was not in the universities and in the schools—its adherents formed, properly speaking, no sect ; it deserved, in fact, the name of philosophy, according to the oldest signification of the word—a love of wisdom, sought and diffused for its own sake alone, by men who felt within them the irresistible vocation to the pursuit of truth. The greatest naturalists and mathematicians, the most profound masters of Greek learning, and the best orientalists of the fifteenth century, both in Germany and Italy, belonged to the followers of this new system. The renewed acquaintance with the literature of Greece had, on the whole, no other effect upon this mystical and more Platonic mode of philosophising, but that of affording to it new materials and new nourishment out of the innumerable treasures and monuments of ancient wisdom ; new means of enrichment, and new instruments of bolder development. These advantages were, in some measure, counterbalanced by the simultaneous introduction of many new errors, or rather the revival of the forgotten

dreams of New Platonism and the Orientals. By the restoration of ancient literature, the then prevalent species of philosophy gained additional extent of knowledge, but an influx of visionary opinions accompanied the change, and, upon the whole, the power which was received was capable of being turned to evil as well as to good.

On the other species of philosophy, the Aristotelic, the effect was still greater. As yet this system had never been studied or comprehended in its purity, but always mingled with a variety of Platonic notions, and in some measure reduced to a sort of subjection to the doctrines of Christianity. But now the opinions of Aristotle began to be sought for in the original language, and to be viewed in connexion with the whole system of Grecian cultivation; and the change could not fail to be extremely favourable, at least in regard to form. The external part of the scholastic philosophy was at all events removed, and that which remained, learned to clothe itself in a form not so entirely unworthy of the classical elegance of antiquity and the critical acuteness of the Stagyrice. But the better and the deeper that the spirit of the ancient philosophy was comprehended, the more frequently did it happen that individual students were betrayed into the adoption of such consequences of their system as are irreconcilable with religion and morality; as, for example, the dogma of establishing as first cause, in the room of God, a mere principle of universal existence, and the other equally dangerous one, of denying the personal immortality of the soul. These errors were abundantly common among the followers of Aristotle, particularly in Italy, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The attempts to renew some of the other systems of ancient philosophy, such as the Stoic, which were made about the same time, were productive of much less effect upon the general progress of philosophy. Plato and Aristotle have so distinctly marked out the two great paths of human thought and science, that they have remained, and always must remain, the master-guides of all succeeding

generations. The other systems of antiquity are valuable, for the most part, only because they resemble one or other of these ; they are slight deviations and by-paths, which soon return again into the main roads. It was for this reason that the plans for renewing Stoicism or any other of the lesser systems, had very inconsiderable success, and produced indeed very little effect of any kind, except that they could not fail to stimulate thought, and increase yet more the general ferment of opinions. Of all these systems, the worst alone, that of Epicurus and of pure materialism, which traces the origin of every thing to the collision of corporeal atoms, began to meet with some success in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth made such progress as might entitle its adherents to say that they belonged to a sect.

In common language, we often hear the epoch of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries called a restoration or a second birth of the sciences. A restoration it undoubtedly was, at least in respect of that renewed acquaintance with Greek literature and antiquity, by means of which, if the historical knowledge of these matters was not indeed rendered perfect, it received at least incalculable improvement. But I can by no means approve of calling it a second birth of the human intellect and of the sciences, for I should consider that name as due, not to such a change as amounts only to an increase of wealth, and is produced by any external circumstances, but to one which consists of an awakening out of previous death, and breaks out from the roused energies of internal life. Such an inward, a living, and a total change upon philosophy as this, was not even produced by the Reformation ; for after it, as before, the Aristotelic and Platonic systems still continued to be the two main divisions of all science. Yet the Reformation exerted a mighty influence upon the future progress, the development, and the extension of both systems. With those Platonic-Oriental doctrines which were before him, and during his lifetime, so prevalent in Germany, the acquaint-

ance of Luther himself seems to have been extremely slight ; such as it was, it helped him to a more cordial hatred of the scholastic system, and of Aristotle, of whom he used to speak with great contempt as a “ dead heathen.” Nevertheless, the best friend and follower of Luther, Melancthon, was of a very different way of thinking ; it was, indeed, chiefly by his means that the authority of the improved scholastic system, and of Aristotle, was re-established in its supremacy. The cause of this was as follows :—That higher and more spiritual philosophy, which, wherever it loses sight of truth, is the most effectual means of introducing all sorts of visionary error, had this effect to a very remarkable extent in Germany during the anarchical times of the Reformation. An universal mistrust of it was the consequence. The Aristotelic philosophy regained its predominant influence over both parties, in Spain as well as in Germany ; for this ancient system of forms, the less the spirit it had, the more easily was it bent and accommodated to the purposes of either sect, and the dogmas of either creed. Although, however, this system was now united with a somewhat superior knowledge of nature, and with better skill in language and antiquity, the evils of which it had formerly been productive still adhered to it ; it continued to be, after all, a logical word-system, and near at hand as its extinction appeared to be even during the fifteenth century, the effects of this favourable moment were now sufficient to secure the protraction of its existence in every cultivated country of Europe down to the end of the seventeenth century. In Italy, the bolder species of philosophy, which there assumed, it must be allowed, the appearance of the most dangerous and violent opposition, was now oppressed, and many most distinguished talents fell a sacrifice to the struggle which ensued. In Germany and England the higher philosophy was not, it is true, altogether oppressed, but it certainly was discouraged, and even persecuted, and became, at all events, entirely excluded from the sphere of the learned. With so much the greater zeal was it cultivated

by individuals of the lower orders of society, and extended in other quarters by the ministration of secret associations. In either of these ways it could not fail to be corrupted and degraded, and kept back from that universal development and effectual influence to which it might otherwise have attained. It is true, indeed, that the gifts of nature and God are open to all; the spirit of deep reflection, and of the highest science, is by no means confined to the polished classes of society, and is a thing entirely unconnected with what is called erudition. Many of the most distinguished of the Greek philosophers were men of little erudition, and destitute of any advantage over other men than what they gained by their power of thought: the wisest of them all, Socrates, was no scholar, and never wished to become one. The first preachers of Christianity were men taken from the vulgar of the people, and yet we see that they have no fear to treat subjects of the most mysterious depth in a manner the most easy and natural. Of such men there has been, through all ages, a successive series. There often lies, in the strong and undissipated spirit of the people, an astonishing energy both of moral and of intellectual strength. The founders of sects and of states, the avengers of their country, and the revivers of religion, have often been men of the vulgar, called and animated to their great works by the voice of internal inspiration. The greatest benefits have been conferred upon mankind, not by writings but by active deeds. If we look to the spirit of invention and the gift of language, and compare philosophy with poetry, we shall find that even in these respects genius is by no means the privileged possession of the learned. We know that it has been possible for a Shakespeare—a man whose learning seems to have been chiefly confined to popular poetry—to reach a height and depth of representation which the most skilful and erudite poets have in vain endeavoured to attain; I see no reason why it should appear to us a thing more marvellous, that a man of the people in Germany should have penetrated into those depths of metaphysical inquiry,



and excited an inventive genius on those secret departments of philosophy, which were entirely out of the reach of the erudite doctors of the time ; need I add the name of Jacob Bohme, the Teutonic philosopher, as he has been called—a name which is to the enlightened a stumbling-block, and to the learned foolishness ; a man who, in spite of all his disadvantages, had many followers, not in Germany alone, but even in other countries, also in Holland and England—among others in this last country, the too celebrated and unfortunate King Charles. I have already more than once expressed my conviction that the very existence of a poetry of the vulgar is in itself a sufficient evidence of the decline and corruption of true poetry ; for that is a possession which should not belong peculiarly either to the common people or to the learned, but equally to all the members of which the national body is composed. If a popular poetry cannot escape betraying some symptoms of this unnatural state, some traces of the corruption and barbarism which are inseparable from this unfortunate separation ; how much more must all this be the case with a popular philosophy—a term which seems to involve in it the very necessity of a contradiction ? However much the genius of individuals may triumph over the circumstances of their situation, it is impossible that philosophy can ever acquire, in their hands, the place which is due to her. This is not the time to depict and explain more fully the very remarkable system of this Teutonic philosophy. This much, however, I may remark, that although it bears very distinctly the traces of having been the creation of one inventive spirit, it is by no means destitute of points of coincidence with those other forms of secret philosophy, the influence of which was at that time ever on the increase. Nor is it at all astonishing that this should have been so, for at that period the unconquerable thirst after truth was every where seeking for itself new and more mysterious paths, and removed as far as possible from the old tracts of verbal science and erudition ; paths which led to fountains of sublime discovery, of lofty conception, but, we must also

admit, not unfrequently of wild dreams and unprofitable error. After the at once visible and invisible bond of the church was dissolved in certain countries of Europe, another altogether invisible system of connexion began to occupy its place. There are degrees in the knowledge of truth, there are higher and lower steps; the higher are scarcely ever attainable to the yet struggling nature of man. I will confess that, according to the opinion of Lessing, there are, among the component parts of human knowledge, some which are in their very nature secret; that is, which are of such a sort that even such as have them in their possession can never find resolution to reveal them. The publication appears always ill-timed; and, moreover, the means of publication are almost perpetually awanting. The existence of such difficulties as these is proved by history to have been common to every age of the world; it is as impossible to prevent such species of knowledge as those of which I speak from being propagated in secret, as it is to render them common to all the world. However much of truth the secret system may contain, the opposition between it, and the open structure of truth, is at all times unfortunate. Even the separation in the visible church at the era of the Reformation, cannot fail to be considered, by all good men, as a great misfortune, for it was a rupture in the family of the Christian people, and, as it were, a tearing asunder of the great body of our species. The existence of an invisible church, in opposition to the visible, must have at that time appeared a yet more alarming occurrence; it must have been viewed as a sort of separation between soul and body, a sure mark of dissolution. But the evil effects which might have been expected have not been realised, the soul and body of mankind are not yet separated, and the unity of truth still remains. He who despises the rock upon which truth stands, will never be able to reach the place of her temple.

That spiritual, Platonic, and oriental mode of philosophising which had been openly adopted by the great men of

Italy and Germany in the fifteenth century, was, after the Reformation, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, either altogether suppressed, or left to the vulgar and to individual visionaries, or propagated in secret, and with great alterations and corruptions. Among the learned men, the old logical word-system, which went so absurdly by the name of Aristotle, retained its undisputed sway till almost two hundred years later ; towards the end of the seventeenth century, it began to be pressed out of view by new sects and systems, the consideration of whose merits must belong to an after period ; for their operation has continued down to our own day, and their full development was the work of the eighteenth century.

As the different nations of Europe became now again more separated from each other, a corresponding and equally unfortunate division took place among the different sciences and studies. The events of the period were hurtful, above all, to the study of antiquity, and prevented it from bearing any right fruit, or having any active influence upon life. The first great restorers of erudition were philosophers, men whose knowledge of the middle ages, and of their own time, was equal to their knowledge of antiquity, who united oriental learning with that of the Greeks and the Romans. They viewed every thing in its proper place ; they took a comprehensive survey of things, and judged of them by their relation to the history of the world, and by the real powers which they possessed. But after the miserable period of separation, when philosophy was persecuted, suppressed, or corrupted, and the middle age forgotten, the attention of the learned, who had no longer almost any connexion with their own world or nation, was entirely restricted to the antiquity of the Greeks and Romans, which they admired without having any proper feeling for the true beauties of its productions. Among poets and artists alone did any lively perception of this exist ; the learned, who scarcely ever united any philosophy with their classical erudition, were satisfied with a mere superstitious worship of the languages.

The true and enlightened knowledge of the spirit of antiquity did not appear till the eighteenth century.

Even in regard to art and poetry, we must always regard it as unlucky that they should spring up without any connexion with philosophy; that the cultivation of the imagination should be separated from that of the understanding; and that the former of these should not unfrequently be placed in exact opposition to the latter. In these stormy days, however, in the ferment and revolutions of which philosophy and history were so much involved, art and poetry, it must be allowed, formed almost the sole asylum wherein feeling and intellect had leisure to unfold themselves in the natural calmness of their beauty.

The poetry of the Catholic countries, the Spanish, the Italian, and the Portuguese, were in that age so much parts of one whole, that I think they should all be considered together. The Spaniards, as we have already seen, possessed very early their national poem of the Cid: their love poetry continued to flourish in the fifteenth century, later than that of any other nation. The general spirit of chivalry, and of the poetry connected with it, was preserved here much longer than in any other country of Europe. Their Chivalric Romances have a tone of feeling almost peculiar to themselves, and are distinguished (above all, the oldest and best of them, the Amadis) by a more polished and beautiful mode of writing than is elsewhere to be found, and by a prevailing fondness for tender and idyllic representations. Here too, then, in the poetry of chivalry, and particularly in that of the Spaniards and the Germans, we find new confirmation of what I noticed in an early part of these lectures—the partiality of all heroic nations and warlike peoples to that which is soft and tender in poetical composition. Along with the Chivalric Romances there grew up among the Spaniards and Portuguese the kindred species of the Pastoral Romance. The poetry of Spain, particularly her love poetry, was cultivated with great success in the fifteenth century, by two men whose birth, rank, and influence, were of the

first order—Villena and Santillana. In general, ever since its first commencement, the poetry of Spain has always been—more cultivated by nobles and knights than by the mere literati and authors. I know of no nation which numbers among its poets so many that have borne arms in the cause of their country. That poetry which we call Spanish, should rather, in its oldest period, be denominated Castilian ; for at first it was peculiar to that province alone ; and many other countries of the Spanish peninsula cultivated poetry in a manner of their own quite different from that of the Castilians. In Catalonia there flourished a species of poetry, which, in respect to language, bore the greatest resemblance to the Provencial. The last and most celebrated of its productions was consecrated to the melancholy fate of Charles of Viane, the last of the royal family, who seems to have been beloved by the Catalonians as their native Prince, and the elder brother, by the first marriage, of that Ferdinand who afterwards ruled over Castile also under the name of The Catholic, and came on this account to be regarded somewhat as a stranger by the inhabitants of Arragon. That province was from this time more and more subjected and despised ; and the peculiar poetry shared the fate of the independence of the country where it had flourished ; by degrees, as the whole political importance came to centre in Castile, so also were all those ornaments of poetry swallowed up in the Castilian poetry, which had before been scattered throughout the different provinces of that poetical land. Of all the inhabitants of the beautiful peninsula, the Portuguese alone, as they continued to be a peculiar nation, preserved a peculiar language and poetry of their own ; yet their old strictness of connexion with Castile was still preserved ; many Portuguese composed in the Castilian dialect, and much of what commonly passes for Castilian is, in reality, by origin Portuguese. The poetry of the two nations is indeed so intimately connected, that it is far from easy to adjust their respective claims to the merit of invention. The Arabs contributed much to enrich and adorn the poetry of

the country which they invaded. It is true, the old Castilian poems are quite free from any such Arabian influence or oriental tone ; they are, on the contrary, distinguished by a strength and simplicity, both of language and of feeling, which bear the sure marks of a very different origin. The more distinct is the absence of all Arabic ornament in the old Castilian poetry, the more clearly do we perceive its presence, in the new. The separation occasioned by differences of religion and perpetual hostilities, may sufficiently account for the want of Arabian ornaments in the poetry of the remoter period. But when Isabella and Ferdinand the Catholic—(I name Isabella first, because the generous principle was peculiarly hers,)—when they with their knights conquered Granada, and after seven long centuries rendered Spain once more entirely free from the foreign yoke ; during that last war between Moors and Spaniards, the fall of the Arabic kingdom of Granada was hastened by internal dissensions and the discord of its nobles. At the head of two contending parties were placed the two great families of the Bencerrajas and the Zegrís. The first embraced Christianity, and became Spaniards ; the second retreated, after the final conquest of the capital, to Africa. There yet exist many romances which celebrate the fame and achievements of the Bencerrajas, their bloody feuds with the Zegrís, and the last struggles of the Granadian Arabs. Proud songs of the most glowing love, and the wildest passion for glory ; mutilated heroic fragments of the most tender feeling ; simple in their language, but yet by no means devoid of the eastern fire ;—these Granadian productions, consecrated to the glory of particular families and tribes, are in their tone and import entirely Saracen, and resemble in most things, so far as we can judge, the original poetry of the Arabian people. Here, in these romances, the most beautiful, according to my judgment, possessed either by the Spanish, or by any other modern people, the Arabian spirit and oriental colouring can no longer be mistaken ; they have tinged with their own hue the whole of the succeeding poetry of Spain. The gar-

worse, by the narrow decisions of the French taste. In regard to national value, of all modern literatures the first place belongs to the Spanish, the second to the English. I do not mean to say that the latter of these is inferior in any degree to the former; but it has had to contend with a greater variety of anti-national elements, and it has gone through a greater number of changes and temporary declensions from the right path. The national unity of the English literature has been preserved in spite of all these obstacles, but rather as if in consequence of some tacit law, than as if from the mere feeling and tendency of its character. I am far from asserting that this is the only point of view from which literature ought to be surveyed. I shall have occasion in the sequel to show that many literatures derive the greater part of their interest from elements of a very different description.

Garcilaso, and some other poets of the time of Charles V. are usually held up by the Spanish critics as models of beautiful language and perfect taste. There is no doubt that they are models of composition worthy of great attention; above all, when we compare them with the artificial and corrupted style of the poets who succeeded them. But I can never believe that either Garcilaso, or any one of his contemporaries, has reached the same point of perfection in poetical language which Virgil did among the Romans, or Racine among the French. Their poems are rather happy effusions of the feeling of love, than great classical works. A lyrical and idyllic poet may show the happy condition of language and poetry in his country, but he can never bring either to their full perfection; for lyrical poems are of too narrow limits and too confined import for this. It is only an epic or a dramatic poet who can ever become a universal and abiding standard for the art and language of his nation. The life of the Spanish people was then so chivalric and rich, their wars in Europe so great and glorious, and their adventures on the sea and in the new world so wonderful and so gratifying to the imagination, that the invented



marvellous of the old romances appeared dull and commonplace when contrasted with these realities. About this time, in other countries, the fashion commenced of turning the subjects of the old chivalric romances into epic poems. In Spain things took a different turn, and poetry became daily more and more historical in its themes. Such at least is the case with the most celebrated epic of the Spaniards, the *Araucana* of Ercilla, wherein the wars of the Spanish adventurers with a free and brave American nation are celebrated or narrated. The appearance of the foreign country, and its savage inhabitants, wildernesses, and natural curiosities, campaigns and combats, all are depicted with such truth and vivacity, that we are kept for ever in mind that the poet was an eye-witness of all that he describes. This first of Spanish epics abounds in individual passages of great poetical power and beauty; but as a whole, it is certainly rather a versified book of travels and history of war, than a poem. The heroic poem should at all times unite historical truth and dignity with the free play of fancy in the regions of the marvellous; it matters little whether the groundwork be historical or fictitious. In my opinion the first of all the national heroic poems which the Spaniards possess, is unquestionably the *Cid*. The Portuguese poet Camoens was in these respects far more fortunate than Ercilla. As the wildernesses of America then belonged to Spain, so the riches of India fell to the share of his nation; a circumstance infinitely more happy for the purposes of the poet. In him, too, we feel that the poet was also a warrior, a mariner, an adventurer, and a circumnavigator. He begins, indeed, with the most violent praise of truth, and boasts that he intends to beat Ariosto by means of real incidents, far surpassing in splendour of marvellousness the fictitious achievements of Orlando and Ruggiero. At its commencement his poem is written in strict imitation of the Virgilian model, a constant adherence to which was indeed the chief fault of all the epic poets of that age. But Camoens, like his own Gama, soon leaves the servile coast-

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sailing of his predecessors, ventures into the wide expanse of ocean, and makes his triumphant progress through rich and undiscovered lands. As the mariner in the midst of the troubles and tempests of the sea, perceives, by the spicy gales, that he is approaching to his Indian haven, so over the later cantos of the *Lusiad* there is diffused the rich air and resplendent sun of the oriental skies. The language is indeed simple, and the purpose serious; nevertheless, in colouring and fulness of fancy, Camoens here surpasses even Ariosto, whose garland he so venturously aspired to tear away. But Camoens does not confine himself to Gama and the discovery of India, nor even to the sway and achievements of the Portuguese of his day: whatever of chivalrous, great, beautiful, or noble, could be gathered from the traditions of his country has been inweaved and embodied into the web of his poem. It embraces the whole poetry of his nation; among all the heroic poets either of ancient or of modern times there has never, since Homer, been any one so intensely national, or so loved and honoured by his countrymen, as Camoens. It seems as if the national feelings of the Portuguese, excluded from every other subject of meditation by the degraded condition of their empire, had centred and reposed themselves in the person of this poet, considered by them, and worthy of being considered by us, as worthy of supplying the place of a whole troop of poets, and as being in himself a complete literature to his country. The most interesting parts of the poem are those passages at the beginning and the close, wherein Camoens addresses himself to the young monarch Sebastian—the same who was destined to involve in the miseries of his destinies the whole fortunes of his people—with love and animating admiration, and yet with some portion of seriousness and warning, as it might be the privilege of a grey-haired veteran, such as he was, to address his king.

Somewhat later than Camoens appeared Tasso, a poet nearer to ourselves by his language, and, in part also, by his subject, which, by the way, is chosen with the utmost

possible felicity—for the Crusades unite, in a manner elsewhere unequalled, the whole fulness of the chivalrous and the marvellous, with the seriousness of historical truth. His subject was still more adapted for his own time than it is for ours ; for the old contest between Christendom and the powers of Mahomet had not yet terminated. Even in the days of Charles V. the heroes and warriors of Spain still flattered themselves with the hope of regaining the lost conquests of Godfrey in the Holy Land ; a thing which, after all, might well have seemed quite possible, after the naval power of Spain had acquired the undisputed superiority in the Mediterranean, and particularly after limits had fairly been set to the tremendous power of the Turkish emperor by land. An inspiration not only poetical but patriotic was derived from the cause of Christendom by this poet, in whom love of glory and piety of feeling were equally predominant. But he has by no means equalled the greatness of his subject ; on the contrary, he has made so little use of its riches, that he may be said to have spent only the superfluities of its treasure. He, too, was in some degree confined by the Virgilian form, from which he has borrowed, with no great success, a few pieces of what is commonly called the epic machinery. Yet Camoens was not prevented by the same sort of belief in regard to the proper form of an epic from interweaving into his poem every thing that could adorn a national heroic poem, and from doing entire justice to the materials of which he had made choice. But in truth, even had his ideas of epic art been more just, I doubt whether Tasso could ever have attained the same success. He belongs, upon the whole, rather to the class of poets who represent themselves and their own exquisite feelings, than of those who can create in their strength of imagination another world, and lose individual feelings in the luxury of their own inventions. The most beautiful parts of his poem are episodes which might have been introduced with equal propriety into any other epic, and have no strict connexion with the subject of the Jeru-

salem. The magic of Armida, the beauty of Clorinda, and the love of Erminia—these passages, and such as these, are the things that bind us to Tasso ; forms of which our German poet has made Tasso himself to say :—

They are not shadows that produce a dream,  
I know they are eternal, for they are.\*

In Tasso's lyrical poems there is a glow of passion, and an inspiration of unfortunate love, which delight us even more than the little pastoral of Aminta, although that, too, is throughout impregnated with the feeling of love. We feel in these poems what the true fountain of love poetry is, and cannot help contrasting them in a very favourable manner with the artificial and cold sonnets of the school of Petrarch. Tasso is altogether a poet of feeling ; and as Ariosto is throughout a painter, so over the language and versification of Tasso there is poured forth the whole charm of music ; a circumstance which has, without doubt, greatly contributed to render him the favourite poet of the Italians. His popularity exceeds very much that of Ariosto. Individual parts and episodes of his poem are frequently sung in the gondolas of the Arno and the Po ; and the Italians having no romantic ballads like those of the Spaniards, have, by cutting down the Jerusalem into fragments, supplied themselves with a body of ballads by full more harmonious, graceful, noble, and poetical than was ever possessed by any other people. Perhaps this mode of dividing their great poem was the best both for the enjoyment and the feeling of it, for there is in truth very little to be lost by throwing aside the connexion of the poem as a whole. How little satisfied Tasso himself was with his own epical art, is sufficiently evident from the many changes and remodelings (for the most part unfortunate ones) which his great poem underwent. The first of his attempts was a mere romance of chivalry ; afterwards, in the decline of life, he entirely recast the whole of the Jerusalem, upon which his fame is

\* Goethe

founded, sacrificing to the morose morality which he had adopted, all the most delightful passages in the poem, and introducing, throughout the whole work, a cold and destructive allegory, little calculated to make up for what he had taken away. He also attempted a Christian epic on the subject of the Creation. But even with poetical powers much more powerful than his, how could it have been possible to extend a few mysterious words of Moses into as many cantos with any portion of success? In speaking of Dante I have already said something on the poetical treatment of such subjects, and I mention this poem of Tasso here, chiefly because it was this in particular which Milton had before his eyes. In his poem of the Creation, Tasso laid aside the use of rhyme, although that forms in truth the greatest charm of many of his productions, and although no poet ever possessed the same command over the instrument which he did; so severe a critic was Tasso of his own poems. I do not however think that we should judge equally hardly of him; he certainly does indulge in a few plays of thought, or *concetti*, as they are called, but he has beauties sufficient to atone for more than all his defects. What sort of an idea of poetry can remain to us, if we take from it the liberty to be a play of fancy? If we are determined to weigh and balance every thought so strictly, there is no question that nothing will remain with us but the sobriety of prose. Even in prose, if we analyse it with sufficient accuracy, we shall easily discover, in the works of the best writers, images, here and there, which are not perfectly just. Many of the fanciful thoughts of Tasso are not only full of meaning, but beautiful as images. A poet of feeling and of love may well be pardoned such trifling errors; faults of the same kind may be found even in these amatory poems of the ancients, which are usually held up by modern critics, like the head of the Gorgon, a terrible image of classical strength and purity, in opposition to the extravagant fancy of the romantic poets.

If we regard Tasso merely as a musical poet of feeling, it



forms in truth no proper subject of reproach, that he is in a certain sense uniform, and throughout sentimental. Uniformity of this sort seems to be inseparable from that poetry which is in its nature lyrical; and I confess it seems to me even a beauty in Tasso, that he has spread this soft breath of elegy even over the representation of the charms of sense. But an epic poet must be richer in every thing; he must be multifarious; he must embrace a whole world of circumstances—the spirit of the past and of the present, of his nation and of nature; he must have command, not over one chord alone, but be master of the whole complicated instrument of feeling. In this sort of poetical wealth Camoens is far the superior of Tasso; in his epic poem there are even many passages of tender feeling and of love, which may sustain a comparison with the most beautiful parts of Tasso. In him, too, amidst all the splendour and charm of his southern imagination, there breaks through, at times, a tone of delightful lamentation and sorrow; and he is entitled to the name of a romantic poet, even had he no other claim, because he is entirely penetrated with the glow and inspiration of love. But he unites the picturesque fulness of Ariosto with the musical magic of Tasso; and what is far more important, he connects both of these with the serious dignity of the true heroic poet—an attribute which Tasso rather wished for than possessed.

After what I have said, you will easily perceive that I make no secret of preferring Camoens to either of the other great Catholic epic poets, Ariosto and Tasso. I am, however, willing to confess, that such judgments as these are at all times produced more or less by personal feeling, for of all those component parts which make up the excellence of a poet, a few only can be subjected to the decision of general principles, while far more is left to be approved or disapproved of, according as it may happen to suit the fancy or feeling of the individual. There is a well-known anecdote of Tasso, which I cannot help wishing to recall to your recollection: it is said that when he was asked which of the

Italian poets was, in his opinion, the greatest, he replied, not without considerable emotion, that Ariosto was the second—the self-love of a poet makes him set so exclusive a value on those qualities which he himself possesses. A lover of poetry is apt to be prejudiced in the same way in favour of those which he is himself most capable of feeling.

I believe that in Tasso the poetical language of Italy appeared with as much of the noble and graceful dignity of the old Roman, as it could have, without throwing totally aside the nature and beauty peculiar to its own construction. After his time, the leaning to the antique became every day stronger, not only in respect to form and style of writing, but also to subjects. The last great poet of the yet flourishing period, Guarini, also a poet of love like Tasso, shows himself in many individual passages of his lyrical pieces, to have been possessed of deeper thought, and even master of a more elevated style, than was ever attained by the poet of Jerusalem. But in the love poems of Tasso, the strain of feeling is certainly more natural and charming. Guarini's Arcadian drama, the *Pastor Fido*, is without any laboured imitation, and although quite full of real feeling and love, entirely impregnated with the spirit of antiquity, and even in the form of its composition, great and noble like the drama of the Greeks. Upon the whole, the theatrical part of the elder Italian literature is by no means the most brilliant one, and their attempts at reviving the tragedy of the ancients have been above all miserably cold and unsuccessful; it is some compensation for this, that so much perfection was reached in a new species of writing which—at least as used dramatically—is quite peculiar to Italy. The superiority of the Italians, in this respect, has been acknowledged by the other nations of Europe: I doubt whether any modern poem has been so much admired and so often translated as the *Pastor Fido*. In France itself, down to the time of Corneille, it was the favourite model of imitation. As a drama, indeed, it was by no means a work fitted to form a path, and establish a theatre, and in so far it may be

said to be very deficient in merit. But, on the other hand, the lyrical poetry of the Italians never took a bolder flight than in some of the choruses and particular speeches of this poem. In treating of Tasso, I have already spoken of that play of thought peculiar to the Romanic love poets, and the conceits of the Italians. The same grounds of apology which Tasso possesses, may in general be pleaded in favour of Guarini, although it must be admitted that some passages are too remote from the natural and the innocently playful, too coldly elaborate and artificial, to admit of any exculpation. Guarini has a few passages which might seem not unworthy of the noble and serious style of a great poet of antiquity; but he certainly touches the limit of that region of voluptuous taste in which Marino appears to have delighted—a poet who has united every thing of luxuriant and effeminate which is to be found in Ovid, or any of the ancient amatory poets, with all of playful and conceited which can be gathered out of Petrarch, Tasso, and Guarini, and blended them all together into one sea of luscious sweetness, which is the more disagreeable to good taste, because every part of the flood has the appearance of proceeding from the fountain not of nature but of imitation.

The poetry of Spain, in its separated situation, was both much longer upheld, and much more happily developed. The imitation of the antique was less predominant, because the national feeling was more acute and lively. For the same reason, the poetry of Spain was more connected with *the present*; romance writing acquired a point of excellence far above what is known among any other people, and the theatre became, not only the most original, but also the richest in Europe.

In poetry, the language of Spain has never had any one era which can be taken as a complete model of perfection for all other periods; and although in later times Garcilaso, and the writers of his time, are commonly enough talked of as classics, this is only in a very limited meaning of the word. The poetical language of Spain remained at all times

free : a great deal too much art has, indeed, been at times employed upon it, and it has often been formed into an appearance far too intensely poetical. But at no time has it been subjected to any universal rule, excepting only that which regards the prevalent system of metre. This appears so much the more remarkable, because even in the earliest times the prose language of the Spaniards attained a form the most fixed and regular ; the sharpest precision has there become so much a second nature, that while the prose of other languages has for the most part tended to corruption, in the way of neglect and carelessness, theirs has rather had to struggle with errors of an opposite description. The danger has been that of degenerating from extreme accuracy and acuteness into a sort of over nicety, for which they only have a precise name—*Alardeza*. Yet of this defect there is no trace in some of the best Spanish writers, among whom the first place is unquestionably due to Cervantes. In his writing, the prose authors of Spain possess a model of perfection, pure and exquisite, such as has never been attained by her poets, chiefly, it is probable, on account of the extreme luxuriance of imagination and invention by which they are distinguished.

The great work of Cervantes is deserving of its fame, and of the admiration of all the nations of Europe, (which it has now enjoyed for more than two centuries,) not merely on account of the beauty of its style, and the perfection of its narrative ; not merely because, of all works of wit, it is the richest in spirit and invention ; but also because it is a most lively and altogether epic picture of the life and peculiar character of Spaniards. It is from this that it derives its ever-enduring charm and value, while the many imitations of it, produced in France and England, are already forgotten or in a fair way of becoming so. What I once said before, in speaking of poetical works of wit,—that in such works the writer should be careful so to adorn with a rich effusion of poetry his narrative, machinery, and the whole of his language, as to preserve undegraded his title to the name of

a poet, receives a strong confirmation from the example of Cervantes. It is common enough to hear critics who talk of him enlarge altogether upon his satire, and say nothing of his poetry ; and there is no doubt that while satire is alike good to all the world, his poetry is exquisitely Spanish. But he who is capable of studying and relishing Cervantes aright, well knows that mirth and seriousness, wit and poetry, are mingled with success elsewhere unparalleled in this rich picture of life ; and that of no one of these elements can the worth and beauty be appreciated unless we observe how it is graced and adorned by the juxtaposition or absolute infusion of the others. The other prose works of Cervantes, his pastoral romance *Galatea*, his novels, and the pilgrim romance which he wrote last of all, partake more or less in these qualities of style and invention which distinguish his *Don Quixote*—a work which is entirely unique in species, and which, the more it is imitated, appears even the more inimitable. This work is the proudest ornament of Spanish literature ; and with justice may the Spaniards be proud of a romance, which, as an universal-national work, has been equalled by no other writer of this order, and which, as a picture of the life, manners, and spirit of a nation, is almost entitled to be classed with the most admirable productions of the epic muse.

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## LECTURE XII.

OF ROMANCE—DRAMATIC POETRY OF THE SPANIARDS—SPENSER, SHAKESPEARE,  
AND MILTON—AGE OF LEWIS XIV.—THE FRENCH THEATRE.

THE romance of Cervantes has been, notwithstanding its high internal excellence, a dangerous and unfortunate model for the imitation of other nations. The *Don Quixote*, a work in its kind of unexampled invention, has been the origin of the whole modern romances, and of a crowd of unsuccessful

attempts among French, English, and Germans, the object of which was to elevate into a species of poetry the prosaic representation of the actual and the present. To say nothing of the genius of Cervantes, which stands entirely by itself, and was sufficient to secure him from many of the faults of his successors, the situation in which he cultivated prose fiction was fortunate far above what has fallen to the lot of any of them. The actual life in Spain, in his day, was much more chivalric and romantic than it has ever since been in any country of Europe. Even the want of a very exact civil subordination, and the free, or rather lawless life of the provinces, might be of use to his imagination.

In all these attempts to raise the realities of Spanish life by wit and adventure, or by the extraordinary excitements of thought and feeling, to a species of poetic fiction, we can perceive that the authors are always anxious to create for themselves, in some way or other, the advantages of a poetic distance ; if it were only in the life of Italian artists, a subject frequently treated in German romances, or in that of American woods and wildernesses, one very common among those of foreigners. Even when the scene of the fable is laid entirely at home, and within the sphere of the common citizen life, the narrative, so long as it continues to be narrative, and does not lose itself altogether in wit, humour, or sentiment, is ever anxious to extend, in some degree, the limit of that reality by which it is confined, and to procure somewhere an opening into the region where fancy is more at liberty in her operations : when no other method can be found, travelling adventures, duels, elopements, a band of robbers, or the intrigues and anxieties of a troop of strollers, are introduced pretty evidently more for the sake of the author than of his hero.

The idea of the Romantic in these romances, even in some of the best and most celebrated of them, appears to coincide very closely with that of irregular and dissolute conduct. I remember it was the observation of a great philosopher, that the moment the world should see a perfect police, the

moment there should be no contraband trade, and the traveller's pass should contain an exact portrait and biography of its bearer, that moment it would become quite impossible to write a good romance ; for that then nothing could occur in real life which might, with any moderate degree of ornament, be formed into the groundwork of such a fiction. The expression seems quaint, but, I suspect, the opinion is founded very nearly upon the truth.

To determine the true and proper relation between poetry, and the past or the present, involves the investigation of the whole depth and essence of the art. In general, in our theories, with the exception of some very general, meaningless, and most commonly false definitions of the art itself, and of the beautiful, the chief subjects of attention are always the mere forms of poetry, things necessary, without doubt, but by no means sufficient, to be known. As yet there has scarcely been any theory with regard to the proper subject of poetry, although such a theory would evidently be far the most useful in regard to the effect which poetry is to have upon life. In the preceding discourses I have endeavoured to supply this defect, and to give some glimpses of such a theory, wherever the nature of my topics has furnished me with the opportunity.

With regard to the representation of actual life in poetry, we must, above all things, remember that it is by no means certain that the actual and present are intractable or unworthy subjects of poetical representation, merely because in themselves they appear less noble and uncommon than the past. It is true that in what is near and present, the common and the unpoetical come at all times more strongly and more conspicuously into view ; while in the remote and the past, they occupy the distance, and leave the foreground to be filled with forms of greatness and sublimity alone. But this difficulty is one which the true poet can easily conquer ; his art has no more favourite mode of displaying itself than in lending to things of commonplace and everyday occurrence, the brilliancy of a poetic illumination, by



extracting from them higher signification, and deeper purpose, and more refined feeling, than we had before suspected them of concealing, or dreamed them to be capable of exciting. Still the precision of the present is at all times binding and confining for the fancy; and when we, by our subject, impose so many fetters upon her, there is always reason to fear that she will be inclined to make up for this restraint by an excess of liberty in regard to language and description.

To make my views upon this point intelligible to you in the shortest way, I need only recall to your recollection what I said some time ago, with regard to subjects of religious or Christian import. The invisible world, the Deity, and pure intellects, can never, upon the whole, be with propriety represented by us—nature and human beings are the proper and immediate subjects of poetry. But the higher and spiritual world can be every where embodied and shadowed forth in our terrestrial materials. In like manner, the indirect representation of the actual and the present is the best and most appropriate. The bloom of young life, and the high ecstasies of passion, as well as the maturity of wise reflection, may all be combined with the old traditions of our nation; they will there have more room for exertion, and be displayed in a purer light than the present can command. The oldest poet of the past, Homer, is at the same time to us a describer of the present in its utmost liveliness and freshness. Every true poet carries into the past his own age, and, in a certain sense, himself. The following appears to me to be the true account of the proper relation between poetry and time. The proper business of poetry is to represent only the eternal, that which is, at all places and in all times, significant and beautiful; but this cannot be accomplished without the intervention of a veil. Poetry requires to have a corporeal habitation, and this she finds in her best sphere—the traditions of a nation, the recollections and past of a people. In her representations of these, however, she introduces the whole wealth of

the present, so far as that is susceptible of poetical ornament; she plunges also into the future, because she explains the apparent mysteries of earthly existence, accompanies individual life through all its development, down to its period of termination, and sheds from her magic mirror the light of a higher interpretation upon all things; she embraces all tenses—the past, the present, and the future—in order to make a truly sensible representation of the eternal or the perfect time. Even in a philosophical sense, eternity is no nonentity, no mere negation of time, but rather its entire and undivided fulness, wherein all its elements are united, where the past becomes again new and present, and with the present itself is mingled the abundance of hope, and all the richness of futurity.

Although, upon the whole, I consider the indirect representation of the present as the one most suitable for poetry, I would by no means be understood to be passing a judgment of condemnation upon all poetical works which follow the opposite path. We must leave the artist to be the judge of his own work. The true poet can show his power even though he takes a wrong way, and composes works which are far from perfection in regard to their original foundation. Milton and Klopstock must at all times be honoured as poets of the first class, although no one will deny that they have both done themselves the injustice to choose subjects which they never could adequately describe.

In like manner, to Richardson, who erred in a very opposite way, by trying to imitate Cervantes in elevating to poetry the realities of modern life, we cannot refuse the praise of a great talent for description, and of having at least manifested great vigour in his course, although the goal which he wished to reach was one entirely beyond his power.

The spirit of Spanish fiction has distinguished itself with equal excellence, and with far more richness, upon the theatre than in romance. The lyrical poetry of feeling is the fruit of solitary love and inspiration; even when it does

not confine itself to the immediate circumstances of an individual ; when it seizes upon an age and a nation, it is still powerful only as the emanation of individual feeling. But heroic poetry implies a nation ; one which either is now or has been ; one which possesses recollections, a great past, a legendary history, an original and poetical mode of thinking and observing—a mythology. Both of these species, the lyric as well as the epic, are much more the children of nature than of art. But dramatic poetry is the production of the city and society ; nay, it cannot flourish unless it have a great metropolis to be the centre point of its development. Such, at least, is its most natural and happy situation ; although schools of imitation and rivalry, established in smaller spheres of action, may in the sequel contend at times not unsuccessfully with the capital, the first seat of the dramatic art. There is no difficulty in perceiving why the stages of Madrid, London, and Paris enjoyed a full century of splendour ; were brought, each in its own way, to perfection ; and were rich, almost to superfluity, long before either Italy or Germany could be said to possess any thing worthy, properly speaking, of the name of a theatre. For although Rome has been, even from antiquity, the capital of the church, and Vienna, ever since the fifteenth century, the seat of the German empire, yet neither the one city nor the other has ever become the metropolis of a nation in the same manner with those three great cities of France, England, and Spain.

As the Spanish monarchy was, down to the middle of the seventeenth century, the greatest and the most splendid in Europe, and as the national spirit of the Spaniards was the most developed, so the stage of Madrid, the living mirror of Spanish life, was the first which arrived at its period of glory. Its richness and fulness of invention have, at all times been recognised by the rest of Europe ; to its peculiar form and meaning, to the true spirit and sense of the Spanish drama, less justice has been done. Had it no other advantage but this, that it is thoroughly romantic,

that alone would be sufficient to render it an object well worthy of attention ; it would be a very interesting thing to see what sort of dramatic poetry that is, which is the pure production of the chivalric poetry in general, and of that peculiar direction of fancy which belongs to modern Europe and the middle ages. In the theatre of no other country can we find so good an example of this as in the Spanish, which always remained quite free from all influence and imitation of the antique ; while, on the other hand, the Italians and French have been led away by their desire to renew in their purity the proper tragedy and comedy of the Greeks, and while these models (acting, as they did, chiefly through the medium of Seneca and the older French plays) have not been without a very considerable influence even upon the drama of the English.

If we consider the Spanish stage in its first celebrated lord and master, Lope de Vega, its general excellencies will appear to us only in a dim and imperfect light ; and we shall, upon the whole, form no very high opinion of the perfection of the Spanish drama ; so hasty and redundant are his almost innumerable plays. As in the lyrical songs of one poet, so also in all the dramatic works of one artist, there may in general be observed a certain uniformity and resemblance, which must, of course, lighten very much the labour of his composition. In the dramas not only of one poet, but even of a whole age or an entire nation, the groundwork is often one general IDEA, which in all of them is properly the same, although in each it is presented in a different point of view, and acting with a different species of operation ; like so many variations of a juridical theme, or so many various propositions in mathematics, all following from the adoption of the same general principle. When a poet has once clearly and thoroughly comprehended this idea, and fixed upon the manner in which he is to use it for his idea and his stage, provided he be at the same time a perfect master of language and theatrical effect, it may very easily happen that he shall produce a very great number of

works in a very regular form, and even without appearing to have been guilty of negligence either in regard to the expression or the arrangement of his productions. It was thus that the great dramatists of antiquity produced, each of them, more than a hundred plays. But the number of the dramas of Lope de Vega, however liberal we may be, must certainly surpass all limit of permitted fertility. The greater part of them must have been not composed, in any proper sense of the word, but dashed off in the manner of a mere improvisatore. I admit that Lope, among all dramatical ready writers, and bulky writers of all nations, and down to the very latest times, is the first and the most of a poet, in richness of invention, in splendour of imagination, and in the fire and strength of his language. The two last qualities are indeed so common in all the poetry of his nation, that we need scarcely enlarge upon their praise as belonging peculiarly to him. Considered by itself, this swiftness of dramatic composition, even with all the talent and fancy of Lope de Vega, is by no means excusable, either in a poetical or in a moral point of view. A strength of arrangement, and a steady law, are so much the more necessary for the stage, because in no other species of composition are carelessness and corruption so easily tolerated, in no other are the public and the author in so much danger of leading each other astray. How easy it must be for a dramatist of such genius as Lope, to carry his age beyond all limits of judgment; how easily, even one without any very splendid qualifications, by means of a sort of theatrical routine, and a little skill in passionate effect, may bring the public taste to such a point that all higher requisites and ideas are entirely forgotten;—we have had so many examples of all this, that it would be quite useless to expatiate upon it. On the other side, theatrical success, we must remember, is of all other means of excitement the strongest and most irresistible in its operation on the vanity of a poet. The public themselves are in general the first to spoil a favourite

dramatist ; they express so much satisfaction with his early and imperfect attempts, that it is no wonder he should soon consider himself as absolved from all obligation to be careful in his compositions. This danger of demagogic corruption and anarchy is a circumstance which was often remarked and lamented by the best of all dramatic judges, the ancients.

However much, in regard to some other species of poetry, as for example that which is properly called popular poetry, our indulgence may be due to a rapid and careless method of composition, the theatre has no similar claim. The stage is entirely a creature of art, and even although hasty and inaccurate writing may be tolerated in plays, unless their plan be clearly laid, and their purpose profoundly considered, they want the very essence of dramatic pieces ; unless they be so composed, they may indeed amuse us with a view of the fleeting and surface part of life, and of perplexities and passions, but they can have none of that deep sense and import, without which the concerns of life, whether real or imitated, are not worthy of our study. These lower excellencies of the dramatic art are possessed in great abundance by Lope de Vega, and many others of the ordinary Spanish dramatists : the plays of these men display great brilliancy of poetry and imagination, but when we compare them with the profounder pieces of the same or of some other stages, we perceive at once that their beauties are only of a secondary class, and that they afford no real gratification to the higher parts of our intellect. How little these, indeed, are accustomed to be taken into account, we may easily gather from the single fact, that very many critics usually speak of Calderon, and Lope de Vega, as poets of the same order, while in truth it would be difficult to find two men more entirely and radically dissimilar both in mind and in art. If we would form a proper opinion of the Spanish drama, we must study it only in its perfection, in Calderon—the last and greatest of all the Spanish poets.

Before his time, affectation on the one hand, and utter

carelessness on the other, were predominant in the Spanish poetry; what is singular enough, these apparently opposite faults were often to be found in the same piece. The evil example of Lope de Vega was not confined to the department of the stage. Elevated by his theatrical success, like many other fluent poets, he had the vanity to suppose that he might easily shine in many other species of writing, for which he possessed, in truth, no sort of genius. Not contented with being considered as the first dramatist of his country, nothing less would serve him but to compete with Cervantes in romance, and with Tasso and Ariosto in the chivalric epic. The influence of his careless and corrupt mode of composition was thus extended beyond the theatre; while the faults from which he was most free, those of excessive artifice and affectation in language and expression, were carried to the highest pitch by Gongora and Quevedo. Calderon survived this age of poetical corruptions; nay, he was born in it, and he had first to free the poetry of his country from the chaos, before he could ennoble it anew, beautify and purify it by the flames of love, and conduct it at last to the utmost limit of its perfection.

This incident in the history of Spanish poetry—its sudden rise to unexampled excellence, immediately following a period of unexampled corruption—is one very well worthy of our attention. It may serve as a sufficient correction of the commonplace opinions and theories on which the doctrine of regular progress and decline in art is maintained. For our own age and nation it may be a lesson of great value, to see how, from the midst of dead artifice and corrupted excrescence, the imagination and poetry of Spain sprung—at the call of one voice into light and beauty, as the Phoenix is regenerated and renewed out of the ashes of her own decay.

But in order to set before you the spirit of the Spanish drama as it appears in its perfection in the works of Calderon, it is necessary for me to prefix a few words upon the true essence of the dramatic art in general, according to the



peculiar views which I have adopted. It is only in the first and lowest scale of the drama, that I can place those pieces in which we are presented with the visible surface of life alone, the fleeting appearance of the rich picture of the world. It is thus that I view them, even although they display the highest sway of passion in tragedy, or the perfection of all social refinements and absurdities in comedy, so long as the whole business of the play is limited to external appearances, and these things are brought before us merely in perspective, and as pictures for the purposes of drawing our attention, and awakening the sympathy of our passions. The second order of the art is that, where in dramatic representations, together with passion and the pictoric appearance of things, a spirit of more profound sense and thought is predominant over the scene, wherein there is displayed a deep knowledge, not of individuals and their affairs alone, but of our whole species; of the world and of life, in all their manifold shapes, contradictions, and catastrophes; of man and of his being, that darkest of riddles—as such—as a riddle. Were this profound knowledge of us and our nature the only end of dramatic poetry, Shakespeare would not merely deserve to be called the first in his art, but there could scarcely be found a single poet, either among the ancients or the moderns, worthy for a moment to be compared with him. But, in my opinion, the art of the dramatic poet has, besides all this, yet another and a higher end. The enigma of life should not barely be expressed, but solved; the perplexities of the present should indeed be represented, but from them our view should be led to the last development and the final issue. The poet should entwine the future with the present, and lay before our eyes the mysteries of the internal man. This is indeed something quite different from what we commonly demand in a tragedy, by the name of catastrophe. There are many celebrated dramatic works wherein that sort of denouement, to which I here allude, is altogether wanting, or which, at least, have only the outward form, but are quite destitute of the internal being and

spirit of it. For the sake of brevity I may here refer you to what I said, in one of my late lectures, concerning the three worlds of Dante, and of the art with which he has represented to us three great classes of human beings—some in the abyss of despair, some in the region of hope and purification, some in the enjoyment of perfect blessedness. All that I then said may be applied in a certain way to the dramas, and in this sense might Dante himself be called a dramatic poet, but that he has chosen to give us only a series of catastrophes, without setting before us, except by some casual allusion, the actions and passions of which these catastrophes are the result. Corresponding to these denouements of human destiny, there are also three modes of that high, serious, dramatic representation, which sets forth, not merely the appearances of life, but also its deeper purpose and spirit, which gives us not only the knot, but the solution of our existence. In one of these we lose sight of the hero in the darkness of a perfect destruction; in another the conclusion, although mingled with a certain dawn of pleasure, is yet half sorrowful in its impression; and there is a third, wherein, out of misery and death, we see a new life arisen, and behold the illumination of the eternal man. To show what I mean by dramas whose termination is the total ruin of their heroes, I may mention among the tragedies of the moderns, *Wallenstein*, *Macbeth*, and the *Faustus* of the people. The dramatic art of the ancients had a peculiar fondness for this altogether tragical catastrophe, which accorded well with their belief in a terrible and predestinating fate. Yet a tragedy of this kind is perhaps the more perfect in proportion as the destruction is represented not as any thing external, capricious, or predestinated, but as a darkness into which the hero has sunk step by step, descending not without free will, and in consequence of his own guilt. Such is the case in those three great modern tragedies which I have cited.

This is, upon the whole, the favourite species among the ancients, yet their theatre is not without some beautiful

specimens of the second and milder termination; examples of it occur in both of the two greatest of the Greek tragedians. It is thus that Æschylus, after he has opened before us the darkest abyss of sorrow and guilt, in the death of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes, closes his mighty picture in the Eumenides with a pleasing feeling, and the final quelling of the spirit of evil by the intervention of a milder and propitious Deity. Sophocles, in like manner, after representing the blindness and the fate of Œdipus, the miserable fate and mutual fratricide of his sons, the long sorrows of the sightless old man and his faithful daughter, is careful to throw a ray of cheering light upon the death of his hero, and to depict in such colours his departure into the protection of pitying and expecting deities, as to leave upon our minds an impression rather of soothing and gentle melancholy than of tragical distress. There are many instances of the same kind both in the ancient theatre and the modern; but few wherein the working of the passions is adorned with so much beauty of poetry as in these.

The third method of dramatic conclusion, which by its representation makes a spiritual purification to be the result of external sorrows, is the one most adapted for a Christian poet, and in this the first and greatest of all masters is Calderon. Among the great variety of his pieces I need only refer you to *the Devotion to the Cross*, and *the Steadfast Prince*, plays which have been very frequently translated, and the remarkable excellence of which has been, upon the whole, pretty generally recognised. The Christianity of this poet, however, does not consist so much in the external circumstances which he has selected, as in his peculiar feeling, and the method of treating his subject which is most common with him. Even where his materials furnish him with no opportunity of drawing the perfect development of a new life out of death and suffering, yet every thing is conceived in the spirit of this Christian love and purification, every thing seen in its light, and clothed in the splendour of its heavenly colouring. In every situation and circumstance,

Calderon is, of all dramatic poets, the most Christian, and for that very reason the most romantic.

Since the Spanish poetry remained at all times free from foreign influence, and throughout purely romantic,—since the Christian chivalric poetry of the middle ages continued with this nation far longer than with any other, even down to the times of their most modern refinement, and received among them a form more elegant than elsewhere, this may appear to be no improper place for saying something, in general, concerning the essence of the romantic. It consists entirely in that feeling of love which is predominant in the Christian religion, and through it in poetry also ; by which sorrows are represented as only the way to happiness ; by which the tragic serious of the Greek mythology, and heathenish antiquity, is softened into a more cheering play of fancy, and in consequence of which, even in regard to the external forms of representation and language, every thing is selected which seems most to harmonise with this feeling of love, and this play of fancy. In this sense of the word, taking *the romantic* to mean nothing more than the peculiar beauty and poetry of Christianity, all poetry might seem to have some claim to the epithet. In fact the romantic is by no means inconsistent with the ancients and the true antique. The legends of Troy, and the poems of Homer, are throughout romantic ; so is all of the really poetic kind which is to be found in the old verses of Indians, Persians, Arabians, or Europeans. Wherever the highest life is comprehended and represented in its deeper meaning, there are to be heard at least some echoes of that godlike love, whose centre point and full harmony lies certainly in the Christian religion. Even in the ancient tragedians the echoes of this feeling are here and there scattered, in spite of the general darkness and worldliness of their conceptions ; the internal love in the midst of all their errors and false images of horror, breaks through in noble sentiments, and diffuses the light of its sublimity over all their bewildered imaginations. *Æschylus* and *Sophocles* are not worthy of admiration on

account of their inimitable composition alone, but of their profound feeling and sentiment. In none of the vivid and natural poets of antiquity is this charm entirely wanting. The romantic is not opposed to the ancients and the antique, but to those false and frigid erudite among ourselves, who strive to imitate the form without being gifted with any portion of the enthusiasm of the antique; and those other moderns who, labouring under an equal mistake, attempt to increase their influence upon active life by making the present their subject, and fail in their attempt, because the confinement to which they thus voluntarily condemn themselves is more than sufficient to neutralise any advantage which they might have hoped to derive.

It will be easily understood that between these three species of dramatic conclusion and representation—that of destruction, of reconciliation, and of glorification, there must be room for many intermediate steps and blendings. It was only for the purpose of letting you know what I conceive to be the true termination of a dramatic piece, that I have formally and separately described these three species—although, after all, they certainly are to be found separately as well as mingled. Even the opposition of ancients and moderns is not a perfect one, but depends merely on the preponderance of one element—a more or a less. Even among the ancient plays we may find some approximations to that method of tragic representation which terminates in purification, and in like manner, we may find, among the moderns, tragedies of utter destruction, which can sustain a comparison with the most powerful masterpieces of the ancients, with whom that was the more favourite species of catastrophe.

Since, however, the excellence of dramatic representation lies in the internal depth of feeling, and the hidden mysteries of the spiritual life, it is evident that the works of antiquity, whatever may be their perfection as pieces of writing, and as high models to stimulate our ambition, they can, in particular instances, furnish no fit rule or example for

our imitation. In general we may be assured, that in regard to the higher drama and tragedy, there cannot be such a thing as a rule useful for all nations. Even the modes of feeling among the Christian peoples (connected as they are by their common religion) here, where the peculiar principle of the internal life should be most powerfully brought forward, are found to be so essentially different, that it would be foolish to require any universal harmony, or to imagine that any one nation could lay down effectual laws for the other. In regard to tragedy and the higher drama at least, so intimately are these connected with internal life and peculiar feeling, that every nation must be the inventor of its own form and its own rules.

I am very far, then, from wishing to see the Spanish drama or Calderon adopted as a perfect and exclusive model for our theatre; but I am so sensible of the high perfection to which the Christian tragedy and drama attained in the hands of that great and divine master, that I think he cannot be too much studied as a distant and inimitable specimen of excellence, by any one who would make the bold attempt to rescue the modern stage, either in Germany or elsewhere, from the feeble and ineffectual state into which it has fallen. Least of all is the external form of the Spanish drama suitable for us. Its flowery fulness of images and southern fancies may be excellent, where this overflowing wealth is nature, but to imitate these qualities elsewhere is the height of absurdity. The remarks which I have already made on more occasions than one, with regard to the poetical representation of mystical subjects, may be applicable in general to those plays of Calderon which are in their import allegoric and Christian.

The chief fault of Calderon—for even he is not without them—is, that he, in other respects the best of all romantic dramatists, carries us too quickly to the great denouement of which I have spoken above; for the effect which this produces on us would have been very much increased by our being kept longer in doubt, had he more frequently

characterised the riddle of human life with the profundity of Shakespeare—had he been less sparing in affording us, at the commencement, glimpses of that light which should be preserved and concentrated upon the conclusion of the drama. Shakespeare has exactly the opposite fault, of too often placing before our eyes, in all its mystery and perplexity, the riddle of life, like a sceptical poet, without giving us any hint of the solution. Even when he does bring his drama to a last and a proper denouement, it is much more frequently to one of utter destruction, after the manner of the old tragedians, or at least to one of an intermediate and half-satisfactory nature, than to that termination of perfect purification which is predominant in Calderon. In the deepest recesses of his feeling and thought, it has always struck me that Shakespeare is far more an ancient—I mean an ancient not of the Greek but of the Northern or Scandinavian cast—than a Christian. In some particulars at least we must allow that the Spanish drama affords the best of all models, particularly in regard to its comedy, which is in every respect thoroughly romantic, and therefore truly poetical. Even upon the stage no true success can ever attend any attempts to raise the representation of the prosaic reality to the rank of poetry, either by means of psychological acumen, or the wit of society; and whoever compares what go on other stages by the name of *plays of intrigue* and *plays of character*, with the romantic witchery of the pieces of Calderon, and his countrymen, will scarcely be able to find words to express his sense of the immeasurable superiority of their poetical wealth over the poverty of the German stage; above all, over what passes for wit in the comedies with which we are entertained.

The poetry of all the southern and Catholic countries continued throughout the sixteenth, and even in the seventeenth century, to partake of the same qualities, and undergo the same vicissitudes. In the other countries of Europe, a great rupture was produced by the reception of the Protestant faith, for the old creed could not be driven into con-



tempt without carrying along with it a variety of images, allusions, personifications, poetic traditions and legends, and modes of poetical composition, which were more or less intimately connected with it. As among the Protestant countries, the one which retained most of the old system, both in regard to the condition of the clergy, and the external forms of worship, was England, so here also was poetry first cultivated in a rich and beautiful manner, and, it may be added, in a manner resembling, in every important particular, the poetry of the Catholic south ; this is sufficiently manifest in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. There is no occasion to recall to your remembrance how fond Shakespeare is of the romantic of the chivalrous time, and even of the southern colouring of fancy ; Spenser is himself a poet of chivalry, and both he and Milton followed romantic, above all Italian, models. The nearer literature comes to ourselves, the richer her productiveness appears in these modern times, so much the more necessary does it become for me to confine myself to those poets and those writers alone, who mark the perfection of language, and cultivation in their nations, and are on that account for other nations, and for the whole world, the most important and instructive. But in truth these three greatest poets of England contain within themselves every thing that is really great and remarkable in regard to her elder literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth ages.

The chivalrous poem of Spenser, the *Fairy Queen*, presents us with a complete view of the spirit of romance which yet lingered in England among the subjects of Elizabeth ; that maiden queen who saw herself, with no ordinary delight, deified while yet alive, by such playful fancies of mythology and the muse. Spenser is a perfect master of the picturesque ; in his lyrical pieces there breathes all the tenderness of the *Idyll*, the very spirit of the *Troubadours*. Not only in the species and manner of his poetry, but even in his language, he bears the most striking resemblance to our old German poets of love and chivalry. The history

of the English literature was indeed quite the reverse of ours. Chaucer is not unlike our poets of the sixteenth century; but Spenser is the near kinsman of the tender and melodious poets of our older time. In every language which is, like the English, the product of the blending of two different dialects, there must always be two ideals, according as the poet shall lean more to the one or the other of the elements whereof his language is composed. Of all the English poets, the most Teutonic is Spenser; while Milton, on the contrary, has an evident partiality to the Latin part of the English tongue. The only unfortunate part of Spenser's poetry is its form. The allegory which he has selected and made the groundwork of his chief poem, is not one of that lively kind which prevails in the elder chivalrous fictions, wherein the idea of a spiritual hero, and the mysteries of his higher vocation, are concealed under the likeness of external adventures and tangible events. It is only a dead allegory, a mere classification of all the virtues of an ethical system; in short, such a one, that, but for the proper names of the personages, we should never suspect any part of their history to contain "more than meets the ear."

The admiration with which Shakespeare regarded Spenser, and the care with which he imitated him in his lyrical and idyllic poems, are circumstances of themselves sufficient to make us study, with the liveliest interest, the poem of the *Fairy Queen*. It is in these minor pieces of Shakespeare, that we are first introduced to a personal knowledge of the great poet and his feelings. When he wrote sonnets, it seems as if he had considered himself as more a poet than when he wrote plays;—he was the manager of a theatre, and he viewed the drama as his business; on it he exerted all his intellect and power; but when he had feelings intense and secret to express, he had recourse to a form of writing with which his habits had rendered him less familiar. It is strange but delightful to scrutinise, in his short effusions, the character of Shakespeare. In them we see, that he who

stood like a magician above the world, penetrating with one glance into all the depths, and mysteries, and perplexities of human character, and having power to call up into open day the darkest workings of human passions—that this great being was not deprived of any portion of his human sympathies by the elevation to which he was raised, but preserved, amidst all his stern functions, a heart overflowing with tenderness, purity, and love. His feelings are intense, profound, acute almost to selfishness, but he expresses them so briefly and modestly, as to form a strange contrast with most of those poets who write concerning themselves. For the right understanding of his dramatic works, these lyrics are of the greatest importance. They show us, that in his dramas he very seldom speaks according to his own feelings, or his own thoughts, but according to his knowledge. The world lay clear and distinct before his eyes, but between him and it there was a deep gulf fixed. He gives us a portrait of what he saw, without flattery or ornament, having the charm of unrivalled accuracy and truth. Were understanding, acuteness, and profoundness of thought, (in so far as these are necessary for the characterising of human life,) to be considered as the first qualities of a poet, there is none worthy to be compared with Shakespeare. Other poets have endeavoured to transport us, at least for a few moments, into another and an ideal condition of mankind. But Shakespeare is the master of reality ; he sets before us, with a truth that is often painful, man in his degraded state, in this corruption which penetrates and contaminates all his being, all that he does and suffers, all the thoughts and aspirations of his fallen spirit. In this respect, he may not unfrequently be said to be a satirical poet ; and well, indeed, may the picture which he presents of human debasement, and the enigma of our being, be calculated to produce an effect far more deep and abiding than the whole body of splenetic and passionate revilers, whom we commonly call by the name of satiric poets. In the midst of all the bitterness of Shakespeare, we perceive continually

glimpses of thoughts and recollections mote pure than satirists partake in; meditation on the original height and elevation of man—the peculiar tenderness and noble minded sentiment of a poet; the dark world of his representation is illuminated with the most beautiful rays of patriotic inspiration, serene philanthropy, and glowing love.

— But even the youthful glow of love appears in his *Romeo* as the mere inspiration of death, and is mingled with the same sceptical and melancholy views of life which, in *Hamlet*, give to all our being an appearance of more than natural discord and perplexity, and which, in *Lear*, carry sorrow and passion into the utmost misery of madness. This poet, who externally seems to be most calm and temperate, clear and lively,—with whom intellect seems every where to preponderate—who, as we at first imagine, regards and represents every thing almost with coldness,—is found, if we examine into the internal feelings of his spirit, to be of all others the most deeply sorrowful and tragic.

Shakespeare regarded the drama as entirely a thing for the people, and at first treated it throughout as such. He took the popular comedy as he found it, and whatever enlargements and improvements he introduced into the stage, were all calculated and conceived according to the peculiar spirit of his predecessors and of the audience in London. Even in the earliest of his tragic attempts, he takes possession of the whole superstitions of the vulgar, and mingles in his poetry, not only the gigantic greatness of their rude traditions, but also the fearful, the horrible, and the revolting. All these, again, are blended with such representations and views of human debasement as passed, or still pass, with common spectators for wit, but were connected in the depths of his reflective and penetrating spirit, with the very different feelings of bitter contempt or sorrowful sympathy. He was not, in knowledge, far less in art, such as, since the time of Milton, it has been usual to represent him. But I believe that the inmost feelings of his heart, the depths of his peculiar, concentrated, and solitary spirit, could be

agitated only by the mournful voice of nature. The feeling by which he seems to have been most connected with ordinary men is that of nationality. He has represented the heroic and glorious period of English history, during the conquests in France, in a series of dramatic pieces which possess all the simplicity and liveliness of the ancient chronicles, but approach, in their ruling spirit of patriotism and glory, to the most dignified and effectual productions of the epic muse.

In the works of Shakespeare a whole world is unfolded. He who has once comprehended this, and been penetrated with its spirit, will not easily allow the effect to be diminished by the form, or listen to the cavils of those who are incapable of understanding the import of what they would criticise. The form of Shakespeare's writings will rather appear to him good and excellent, because in it his spirit is expressed and clothed, as it were, in a convenient garment. The poetry of Shakespeare is near of kin to the spirit of the Germans, and he is more felt and beloved by them than any other foreign, I had almost said, than any vernacular, poet. Even in England, the understanding of Shakespeare is rendered considerably more difficult, in consequence of the resemblance which many very inferior writers bear to him in those points which come most immediately before the eye. In Germany, we admire Shakespeare, and are free from this disadvantage ; but we should beware of adopting either the form or the sentiment of this great poet's writings as the exclusive model of our own. They are indeed, in themselves, most highly poetical, but they are far from being the only poetical ones ; and the dramatic art may attain perfection in many other ways besides the Shakesperian.

The delightful chivalry of Spenser, and the freedom of the universal Shakespeare, were misunderstood, contemned, and even persecuted, after the spirit of fanaticism, which, in the days of Elizabeth and James, had existed only as a hidden disorder, burst forth at once in all its power and offensiveness, in all its overwhelming and disgusting viru-

lence, under Charles I. Shakespeare was, in a peculiar manner, an object of hatred to the Puritans, for whom he certainly seems to have had no partiality, exactly as he still is to their descendants the Methodists, and other similar sects, which are at present so powerful in Britain. But, although the Puritans disliked Shakespeare, they were by no means without poetry; on the contrary, in the bosom of their sect and age, there was produced a poet who must ever be classed with the first and most remarkable of his nation, and of the world. The poetry of the world and human nature was held as unlawful among the bigots; the art which would express the image of that time was obliged to be entirely directed towards spiritual concerns, as is the case with the ever-serious and stately muse of Milton. The *Paradise Lost* partakes in all those difficulties and defects, which, as I have already said, attend all Christian poems which attempt to make the mysteries of our religion the subjects of their fiction. It is strange that Milton did not observe, that the loss of Paradise forms in itself no complete whole, but is only the first act of the great Christian history of man, wherein the creation, the fall, and the redemption, are all equally necessary parts of one mighty drama. It is true that he sought afterwards to remove this main defect by the addition of the *Paradise Regained*, but this poem is too insignificant in its purpose and size to be worthy of forming the keystone to the great work. When compared with the Catholic poets, Dante and Tasso, who were his models, Milton, as a Protestant, laboured under considerable disadvantages, by being entirely denied the use of a great many symbolical representations, histories, and traditions, which were in their hands the most graceful ornaments of Christian poetry. He was sensible of this, and attempted to make amends for the defect by adopting fables and allegories out of the Koran and the Talmud, such as are extremely unfit for the use of a serious Christian poet. The excellence of his epic work consists, therefore, not in the plan of the whole, so much as in particular beauties and

passages, and in general in the perfection of the high language of poetry. The unusual admiration which was attracted to Milton in the eighteenth century rested upon particular traits and representations of paradisaic innocence and beauty, and upon the picture of hell, and the character of its inhabitants, whom this poet has depicted in a style great and almost antique, as giants of the abyss. Whether it has, upon the whole, been advantageous for the English language of poetry that it has been leaning more to the Latin than to the Teutonic side, that it has followed Milton more than Spenser—this is a point which I cannot help viewing as extremely doubtful. If such a leaning, however, was to take place, there is no question that Milton was the best model in that way, and in many respects well entitled to be himself the standard of the high and serious poetical language of England. But the truth is, that any exclusive standard is injurious in a language so composed of opposite elements as the English is; for it is the very nature of such a language, if not to be perpetually vacillating between two extremes, yet certainly to retain the freedom of approximating more nearly at different times to the two opposite boundaries of its domain. The whole wealth of the English tongue, powerful as it is in this mixture, and the various modifications which that admits of, can only be appreciated by those who study it in Shakespeare.

After the Puritan period had passed away, the English literature and language began to be infected with another species of barbarism; the adoption of the then corrupted but predominant taste of the French. It was not till the full restoration of political freedom took place, at the close of the seventeenth century, that intellect recovered from the oppression under which it had lain. So deeply had the foreign taste taken root, that the eighteenth century had commenced before the old poets of the nation began to be as it were discovered, and brought into light out of oblivion.

The French literature possessed, in the latest Burgundian times, under Francis I. and in the sixteenth century, a



great abundance of those historical memoirs of which it has at all times been so productive; pictures after the life, which, by their exquisite representation of individuals, and by the immense number of traits, the immediate offspring of personal observation, have the effect of entirely transporting us back into the manners, society, and general spirit of the age depicted. The peculiar talent for applying, in a tone of social intercourse, a species of light and sarcastic philosophy to the ordinary affairs of life, was in like manner very early developed among the French. I need only allude to two great masters in these two different walks of literature, Philip de Commines and Montaigne. The old French language is for the most part careless, inaccurate, and perplexed with intricate periods, but along with all these defects it possesses, in the hands of Montaigne, and some of the better writers of the old time, a certain naïveté and natural tone of sentiment, which are the more charming, on account of the careless and unaffected style in which they are expressed. But that, upon the whole, the French language of the sixteenth century was extremely ill adapted, either for poetry or wit—that it was altogether unworthy of being compared with the languages of the neighbouring countries—and gave little promise of the noble and tasteful perfection to which itself has since attained—all this may easily be gathered from Marot and Rabelais, in spite of the high talents which both of these writers possess. If we take a general view of the neglected, uncultivated, and, in many respects, barbarous condition of the older French literature and language, we cannot fail to consider the changes introduced into both, by Cardinal Richelieu, and the academy of which he was the founder, as a very necessary and fortunate one. The literary supremacy of the new academy was indeed, like the political sway of its head, a yoke of iron; its operations partook of the celerity and decision of despotism. The regulation of language was its first attempt, and this certainly was very soon crowned with the most complete success. In prose this is universally to be

seen : not only the first and most celebrated writers, but we might almost say all the writers of the last part of the seventeenth century, are distinguished by a peculiar charm of noble style. We have only to reflect on the immense number of letters, memoirs, (even of women,) tracts of men of business, none of them ever intended for the press, and composed by persons who made no pretensions to the character of writers ; all these are remarkable for a peculiar and graceful taste, of which scarcely any trace is to be discovered among the French authors of the succeeding age. Among the poets, I think that, at the same period, Racine attained, in language and versification, a point of harmonious perfection, even beyond what has been reached by Milton in English, or even Virgil in Latin, and very far superior to any thing which has ever since been seen in France. With a view to the poetry itself, and even for its language, it is true there is much reason to wish that, along with this skilful perfection, a little more freedom had been left ; that the elder French poetry of the chivalrous period, which, as we have seen, produced not a little of beautiful and lovely, both in regard to language and invention, had not been so entirely and without exception thrown aside. It might have been quite possible to unite, as was done by the Italians, and by some other nations, the perfection of a rich and earnest style with the poetical spirit of chivalry. The French language and poetry might then have preserved a great deal more of that romantic tendency and old poetical freedom which Voltaire so often wished they could regain, and which he himself attempted, although with very imperfect success, to restore. Yet such a forgetting and total contemning of all that has gone before is inseparable from every great and entire change, even in literature. It was a revolution. As might have been expected, much secret opposition at all times remained against the harsh sway, and this became more and more apparent, when, in the days of the Regent and Lewis XV., the French learned to think, with even increasing earnestness, after the freedom

of the English, not only in civil affairs, but also in literature and in language. In consequence of the irregular, and in part ill-intentioned manner wherein these inclinations were gratified, and the foreign modes introduced and rendered predominant, there arose, during the time of these princes, that corruption of taste which, having gradually attained its summit, broke out into the wildest appearances of anarchy, even before the revolution, and which, like other rebels will, I fear, be with great difficulty ever completely reconciled to the restoration of the ancient obedience.

The true flourishing period of the French poetry was the latter half of the sixteenth century. Ronsard, in the sixteenth century, was only the remote forerunner of the great poets of the age of Lewis XIV. ; Voltaire, in the eighteenth, was only their ingenious follower, who attempted, with sometimes great, and sometimes very indifferent success, to supply what he conceived to be the chief defects of the poets of his own time. The true defect which presses most severely on the French poetry is this, that the cultivation of the more artificial species was not preceded by any truly classical, successful, and national epic poem. Ronsard, indeed, attempted this, nor is he without fire and energy, but his style is full of false bombast ; as it often happens that when any one attempts to make a sudden escape from barbarous rudeness he is very apt to fall into the opposite defect of far-sought, pedantic, and artificial expression. Of all the poets, even including those of Italy, who have corrupted their language by desiring to make it too much like that of antiquity, the defect is most visible in the writings of Ronsard. Even the choice of the subject in his *Franciade*, must be considered as extremely unhappy. Had a French poet chosen some part of the ancient national history to be the groundwork of an epic poem, he might have been excused for introducing, by way of episode, the fable which traces the Franks from the heroes of Troy—an absurd fable to be sure, but one which was very commonly believed among the knights and minstrels of the middle ages. But it was cer-

tainly an unfortunate idea to think of making such a foolish legend the very basis of the *epopee*. The achievements and fortunes of St Lewis might, in many respects, have appeared the best subject of an epic poem for a poet of old France; for they stand in the most intimate connexion with the whole world of romance, and in the midst of all the seriousness of historic truth; and the associations of patriotism and piety, connected with the adventures of a sainted hero, present to the fancy as wide a range as could have been produced by the most perfect rejection of every thing either true or natural. The only difficulty was that presented by the ill-fated termination of the crusade of St Lewis. In the story of the Maid of Orleans, which was selected by Chapelain, the difficulty consisted in this, that the heroine who delivered France, was betrayed into the hands of her enemies, and abandoned to a shameful death by the hands of her own countrymen, who had, in the former part of her life, deified and adored her. The same thing which has often happened in the history of French heroes, occurred in literature to Ronsard. He was praised beyond all bounds in his own lifetime, and exalted to the very heavens; immediately afterwards he fell to the dust, and past into the most perfect oblivion. But the name of Ronsard is still one which must not be omitted in the history of literary France; for it is undeniable that the great Corneille, the friend and admirer of Chapelain, had formed himself in the elder school of Ronsard, or at least reminds us, every now and then, of the peculiarities of his diction.

The tragedy of the French is considered by themselves as the most brilliant part of their literature, and as such has ever attracted the chief attention of other nations. Their tragedy expresses so abundantly their national character and mode of feeling, that there is no difficulty in conceiving why they should have come to think so highly of it, even although the subjects of its earlier productions are almost never taken from their own national history. It is not indeed to be denied, that all these Greeks, Romans, Span-

iards, and Turks, whom it represents to us, are Frenchmen in many things besides their language; yet it is certainly unfortunate that the French tragedy has remained almost entirely foreign, and very rarely represented French heroes. The circumstance is probably to be explained by the want of any successful and universally known French epic poem. Besides, the most tragical incidents in the old French history could not fail to excite disagreeable recollections and comparisons, ill adapted for the purpose of a stage entirely dependent upon the court. It was the great defect in French literature, that an authoritative tone of appeal to the national feeling was kept up by no one species of serious poetry—above all, that this was utterly lost sight of by their first tragedians. The defect was well understood by Voltaire, and he attempted to remedy the evil by choosing subjects out of the old French history, and more generally by introducing the feelings and manners of the chivalrous period upon the stage. The national feelings which he endeavoured to excite, did not begin to display themselves till considerably after; but the glory is indisputably his, of having succeeded, in romantic tragedy, beyond any other of his countrymen.

Although, however, the subjects of French tragedy, are, with a few exceptions, foreign, yet this whole department of their literature is, without doubt, in the highest degree expressive of the peculiar turn and feeling of the French spirit and character. I therefore gladly recognise in it a species of poetry highly perfect in its execution, and thoroughly national in its tendency; but the more natural it is, the less is it adapted to be the standard and model of any other theatre. It is the duty of every nation to be the inventors and creators of their own drama.

The form of the French tragedy is regarded by most as a mere imitation of the Greek, and judged of by that standard; but it ought to be recollected that the great masters of the French stage were themselves the first who suggested the fact to us, and pointed this out in their prefaces, as the

proper point of view from which their productions should be contemplated. Racine appears in this respect to the greatest advantage; he speaks with a true and lively knowledge of the Greeks, which we should in vain seek for in any of the other French writers; and if his judgment be not always satisfactory to us, (for the Greeks have been much more accurately studied since his time than before it,) we can yet recognise, in all that he says, a feeling of the excellence of their art and poetry, which none but great poets, such as Racine himself was, are capable of possessing. Corneille, in his prefaces, is always battling with Aristotle and his commentators, who are indeed very often much in his way, till at the close we find him ratifying either a total capitulation or a hollow truce with those fatal enemies of all poetical freedom. We cannot avoid being surprised at the humility with which this mighty genius seems to submit himself to fetters so confining, and so entirely self-imposed. The prefaces and dissertations of Voltaire always open with the same assertions, namely, that the French nation, and, if possible, still more the French stage, is the first in the world, and that nevertheless Corneille and Racine, with all their excellencies, have left very much to be done. The reader is commonly left in a situation which enables him very easily to discover who is, in Voltaire's opinion, the great genius destined to supply all these defects, and to surpass Corneille and Racine as much as they do the tragedians of foreign nations.

That the form of the Grecian tragedy, and the celebrated treatise of Aristotle, (as it is understood by them,) have in many respects confined and injured the French poets—that a great part of the law of the three unities, more particularly of those of time and place, is absurd, and in total opposition to the true nature of poetry, in which we do not consider physical possibility with arithmetical exactness, but rather judge according to the effect produced on the imagination by a verisimilitude not historical but poetical,—all this has been so frequently handled since the time of



Lessing, that it is needless to revive a contest which has been so often fought with the same issue. There is only one observation which I shall make, and that is of the historical kind; of all the French writers, the one who did most to establish the enslaving influence of the mistaken Greek models and critics, was Boileau. How hurtful the effects of his precepts must have been on the French poetry, may be gathered from the one fact, that he treats Corneille with almost the same severity as Chapelain. What gives the most perfect idea of the man is, to my view, that well known maxim of his, "of a rhyming couplet, the last verse should, if possible, be first made." Instead of the true judgment and feeling of art, in his own criticism, he is fond of a species of ridicule which is in general by no means the most delicate; and instead of poetry, he is most anxious for a full and perfect rhyme. I perfectly agree with the opinion of Racine, who wrote in these terms to his son, concerning his friend Boileau, "Boileau is an excellent man, but at bottom he knows absolutely nothing about poetry."

Another great rule of this critic is the one borrowed from Horace, according to which a work of intellect should be as many years before it is published, as a human child lies months in the womb before it is born. In spite, however, of all the authority of Boileau, there is no doubt that the *Athalie* of Racine, and the *Cid* of Corneille, which I must always hold to be the two most glorious productions of French poetry, were neither of them subjected to any such process of tedious elaboration, but both brought at once before the world in the inspiration and glow of their first conception. These two creations, the finest of which the French stage can boast, may best inform us what height that stage has reached, and at what point it has been obliged to stop in its imitation of the nobler drama of the Greeks.

However little the modern expounders of Aristotle may be aware of its consequences, the fact itself is sufficiently certain, that the lyrical songs form the essential part in the



tragedy of the ancients ; that the dialogue is a mere appendix and interlude to the chorus, not the chorus to the dialogue ; and that he who would imitate this species of writing with success, must be at least as much a lyrical as a dramatic poet. The *Cid* of Corneille is intensely lyrical, and the tone of this inspiration alone gives it that magical power, against which envy and criticism are of no avail. Racine, in his *Athalie*, has restored the chorus of antiquity, with many alterations no doubt, but in a manner which seems to me exquisitely adapted for the purposes which he had in view. Had the French tragedy advanced further in the path pointed out by its two greatest masters in their two most excellent productions, I have no doubt it might have approached, much more nearly than it has done, to the power and dignity of the antique ; many of the narrow fetters, imposed by mere prosaic misunderstanding, would of themselves have dropt away, and the genius of the drama, being more at liberty, would certainly have attempted achievements of higher ambition than any to which it has as yet aspired.

The universal custom of striking out the lyrical part of the ancient tragedy, was productive of a very great inconvenience ; more particularly when the subject of the drama happened to be one of those same mythological legends which had of old been handled by the Greeks. When the lyrical part is taken away, the plot was found to be too little to fill up the tragedy, and recourse was had to the same means of supplying the vacant space, which had been adopted by the ancients themselves when their drama was on its decline. The plot was thickened by a crowd of interpolated intrigues, extremely hurtful to the purpose and dignity of tragedy ; or else the whole was filled up with that rhetoric of the passions, which every tragical subject affords such easy means of introducing. In one point of view this last expedient has been of great advantage to the French tragedy ; it has lent to it a strength which it wants in all other respects, and enabled it to express, with great effect,

the character and spirit of a nation, among whom, in all their relations, rhetoric has always exerted the greatest influence—whose private life itself is filled in a great measure with this very rhetoric of the passions. Besides, a certain measure of this rhetoric is a necessary and indispensable element of all dramatic representation. The thing is, no doubt, overdone in the French tragedy ; but its preponderance there is founded upon national feeling, and any attempt to imitate the peculiarity would be quite absurd among any foreign people—more particularly among those who have greater feeling for poetry than natural talent for rhetoric.

The partiality of the French for this rhetorical part of their tragedy is so great, that the decision of the audience is founded much more upon the oratory of the individual speeches, than the dramatic connexion and effect of the whole piece. But if we attend to those parts of their drama of which they themselves are in general negligent, and study in particular those plays which have a true and poetical denouement of the kind which I have above described, we shall find that, even in this respect, the French tragedy is the child of the antique ; that its termination is in general one of complete destruction, or that, if there be any softening, the sorrow still continues to be by far the predominant material. There are indeed a few delightful exceptions. In his *Athalie*, Racine shows himself to be a Christian poet, and brings victory out of the conflict ; and in the *Alzire*, in like manner, death and suffering are represented as the avenues of eternal life and blessedness. This last play is the masterpiece of Voltaire ; in it he appears indeed worthy of his two illustrious predecessors.

## LECTURE XIII.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—BACON, HUGO GROTIUS, DESCARTES, BOSSUET, PASCAL—CHANGE IN THE MODE OF THINKING—SPIRIT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—PICTURE OF THE ATHEISM AND REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT OF THE FRENCH.

THE seventeenth century was rich in distinguished writers, not only in elegant literature, poetry, and eloquence, but also in the sciences and in philosophy. The philosophy and system of thinking which belonged to the eighteenth century, which during that period extended themselves over all the departments of literature, and even acquired a most determinate influence over the fate of men and of nations,—these were not without their precursors in the age immediately preceding; although it is true that the first founders and establishers of the new doctrines soon ceased to attract much attention, after their labours were surmounted by the more imposing structures of their successors. It is absolutely necessary, however, to take into view Bacon, Descartes, Locke, and some other of the heroes of the seventeenth century, before we can rightly depict or understand the true nature of those intellectual and moral changes which were introduced by Voltaire and Rousseau, not only into France, but into all Europe, and in general into the whole spirit of the eighteenth century.

The sixteenth century was the age of ferment and strife, and it was only towards its close that the human mind began to calm and collect itself after the violent convulsion it had undergone. With the seventeenth century commenced that new mode of reflection and inquiry to which the way had been laid open by the restoration of classical learning, the great improvement in natural science, and that universal shaking and separation of faith occasioned by the

reformation of Luther. The first name to which we turn is that of the great Bacon. This mighty genius, by carrying the spirit of inquiry out of the verbal contentions of the dead schools, into the regions of experience, above all of life and nature, has become the father of modern physics : he made and completed many illustrious discoveries himself, of many more he seems to have had a dim and imperfect foresight ; it is the work of ages to follow out the hints which are dropped by such a spirit in the progress of its excursions. By means of his rich and indefatigable intellect, the whole sciences of experience have been immeasurably enlarged, or rather they have been entirely regenerated ; the common shape of mind, nay, we may say, the common shape of life, in modern Europe, has received a spark of new animation from the inspiring touch of this Prometheus. The dangerous consequences produced by the injudicious extension of his principles, at the time when his followers and admirers in the eighteenth century thought they could derive more than he had ever dreamed of, from experience and the senses—the laws of life and commerce, and the just notion of faith and hope—and threw away from them, as mysticism, whatever cannot be proved by the common experience of sense : these, indeed, were alarming and reprehensible, but they cannot be with justice ascribed to the spirit of Bacon. I need only recall to your recollection one celebrated saying of his, which has by no means become obsolete, that philosophy, when studied superficially, leads to unbelief and atheism, but when profoundly understood, is sure to produce veneration for God, and to render faith in him the ruling principle of our life. Not only in religion, but even in natural science, this great man believed in many things which have been despised as mere superstitions by his followers and admirers in later times. It is not easy to suppose that he was influenced, in regard to these matters, by the mere faith of custom, and some not yet overcome attachment to the common prejudices of his day. For in truth his expressions concerning the world above the senses,

bear as much as any part of his writings, the clear impress of his penetrative and peculiar spirit. He was a man who had as much feeling as invention ; and although the world of experience had revealed itself to him in altogether a new light, the higher and divine region of the spiritual world, which is situated far above common experience and sense, was not viewed by him either obscurely or remotely. How little he himself partook, I will not say, in the rude materialism of his followers ; but even in that spiritual deification of nature which became fashionable in France, and, though in a lesser degree, in Germany, during the eighteenth century, this may be abundantly proved by a simple maxim which he has uttered respecting the proper essence of true and philosophical inquiry in physics. In the natural philosophy of the ancients, says he, there is this to blame, that they held nature to be an image of the Godhead ; for, according to truth, with which also the Christian doctrine has no variance, man alone is a type and image of God, while nature is no glass, likeness, or similitude of him, but only the work of his hands. By the natural philosophy of the ancients, it is sufficiently evident, from the extensive form of Bacon's argument, that he here meant to designate not any one particular system, but in general every thing most good and excellent in the opinions of the ancients concerning natural philosophy—a term under which it is besides more than probable that he comprehended not physical science alone, but mythology and natural religion. When Bacon, according to the doctrine of the Scriptures, asserts that it is the privilege of man alone to be an image of the Deity, we are not to understand that he had ascribed to man this high and peculiar excellence, merely as being the most glorious and complex of all natural productions ; he took the language of the Bible in its literal sense, and believed this resemblance and image to be the gift of God's love and inspiration. In the figurative expression, that nature is no mirror or image of God, but only the work of his hand, there may be found, if we understand it in its due profoundness

of meaning, a perfect statement of the true relation between the world subject and the world superior to the senses—between God and nature. It expresses that nature is not self-originating or self-existent, but a production of the divine will for a particular purpose. We may obtain from this short and simple maxim respecting the natural philosophy of the ancients, and that of the Christian Scriptures, and of Bacon, a clear and intelligible guide to point out the right path between the dangers of impious veneration for nature on the one hand; and on the other, of that dark aversion for nature into which confined and partial reason too often falls, when, directing itself entirely to morality, it can neither understand external nature, nor the Deity who is alike predominant over the natural and the moral world. The proper distinction and relation between nature and Deity, is the leading principle not only of all thought and belief, but of human life and intercourse. This circumstance, and the saying of Bacon, which embraces the result of all his reflections concerning nature, are the more worthy of our attention, because, even in our own time, philosophy is still, for the most part, divided between these two extremes; the one that culpable deification of nature, which distinguishes not between the Creator and his works—God and the world; the other, the hatred and blindness of those despisers of nature, whose reason is too exclusively egotistical in its direction. The right middle-path between these two opposite errors, or the true recognition of nature, finds its expression in the feeling which we have of our own internal connexion with nature, as well as of our superiority over it, and in that peculiar reverence and admiration with which we regard all those parts of nature that have in them something of a higher and different character—all of lovely or of lawful; which reveals to us, in a more striking manner, the traces of a fashioning hand and a superintending intellect.

The influence exerted during the seventeenth and a great part of the eighteenth centuries over philosophy and univer-

sal thought, by Lord Bacon, was not more considerable than that of Hugo Grotius over the practical and political world, and the general eithics of international intercourse. And in truth this influence was a happy and wholesome one; for as, after the dissolution of that religious bond which formerly united the western nations in one political system, the universal and impious statesmanship of Machiavelli had always been becoming more and more the favourite rule of conduct, surely no greater service could be rendered to humanity, than giving to self-destroying Europe an universal and composing law for all her nations—unhappily so much divided in faith, so much inflamed in passions, and so much corrupted by the prevalence of a doctrine alike abounding in sophistry and vice. Hugo Grotius was universally acknowledged to have accomplished this noble purpose. It is an elevating thought that a mere man of letters, a philosopher, having no power except that of his own intelligence and eloquence, should have been the unassisted founder of such a system of national law: as he gained by his exertions the veneration of his contemporaries, so he is no less entitled to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. If we consider it as a system, the national law founded and introduced by Hugo Grotius and his followers may appear indeed extremely defective, and be sufficiently open to the cavils of a sceptic. The religious bond of the elder political union was an irremediable loss. In the absence of this the doctrine of right was now to be founded entirely upon the innate and necessary ideas of men respecting their own social place and destination. The more entirely the universal morality was grounded by Grotius and his followers on nature and reason, and conducted according to the capabilities of these imperfect guides, the more did the first great fountain of all morality come to be neglected; and the more unavoidably did it happen that both the theory and practice of national law lost themselves in a multitude of useless, and, in part at least, inextricable difficulties and niceties, on the one side and on the other, in a set of conclusions which were no less



dangerous than extravagant. It is indeed difficult to compute how much evil, both in opinion and in action, was produced by the doctrines of natural right, and the statesmanship of reason, in the last half of the eighteenth century. Yet it must always remain a great benefit, that through the doctrine of international law, extended and recognised by means of Grotius, a mighty bulwark was placed before the encroaching stream of corruption for at least one full century. From 1648 to 1740 there is no doubt that many evident and great outrages against international justice were committed, but they were all exclaimed against; and it was much that power and ambition were thus subjected to some constraint, and compelled to observe at least the appearances of rectitude. Even from 1740 to 1772 these beneficial effects were still displayed; and, although certainly in a less degree, perhaps even in the more stormy and tumultuous period which succeeded. Now, indeed, the nations of Europe have undergone a second great convulsion, and as peoples and states have been so much changed, it is no wonder that the old rules and forms, by which their intercourse was regulated, should have passed away.

Of all the writers who have produced a great and universal effect on the practical world, and the political relations of Europe, the influence of Grotius has certainly been the most salutary. In regard to the importance of his works, he can only be compared with Machiavelli before, and Rousseau after him.

In addition to his labours for the restoration and recognition of justice and its theory, the active intellect of Grotius was also exerted in the attempt to set forth the truth of religion in a formal, and, so to speak, in a *rational* manner. It was one of the indirect effects of Protestantism that religion came to be perpetually looked upon as a subject of contention, and consequently to be treated as a matter of reason—an error which formed besides a part of the original spirit and system of the second great leader of the Reformation, Calvin. Grotius has had many followers in an attempt, of

which the audacity seems every day more remarkable, although there can be no reason to doubt the excellence of his motives. In itself, I must consider it as a sure token of declining religion, that what is by nature a matter of the most internal feeling and lively faith, should be embraced as a business of mere reason, and considered as the fit subject of learned controversy—that the truth of religion should be handled like a process of civil law, or, what is still worse, as Pascal would have desired to see it, like the solution of a regular problem in geometry.

I cannot bring myself to look upon the philosophical labours of Descartes as equally important with those of these two great men ; his influence upon his own age, and the following one, was rather dangerous and productive of error, than salutary and truly vivifying. In general, Descartes appears to me a perfect proof that a man may be, at least as the exact sciences have as yet been cultivated, a great mathematician, (which he certainly was for his age,) without being on that account the more successful in philosophy. It is true, that those hypotheses, from which Descartes attempted to explain not only all the separate facts in physics, but even the origin of the universe, have been long forgotten. His system possessed only for a very short time its supremacy, and was, in fact, never very much extended out of France. Yet his strange hypothesis of the vortices was not without a considerable and even abiding effect upon the spirit of the seventeenth, and through that, of the eighteenth century. Above all, his method, as he calls it, or the mode in which he began to philosophise, has found many imitators. It was the great object of his desire to be throughout an original thinker, in the strictest and most perfect sense of the word. For this purpose, he resolved to forget, once for all, every thing he had before known, thought, or believed, and to begin entirely anew. Of course, all the philosophers and inquirers of preceding ages were entirely neglected, and their labours overlooked as matters unworthy of notice by this original reflector. Were it possible at pleasure to throw

entirely and effectually aside the thread of inherited thought, (by which we are, in spite of ourselves, inseparably connected through language,) the consequences of this could be no other than destruction. The case would be exactly as if some innovator in the political world should dream himself capable of stopping the great wheel of public life, and of substituting, in place of that complicated machinery which a nation has formed for itself in the progress and struggle of ages, some simpler, and, as he thinks, better invention of his own devising,—a constitution springing fresh and pure from his own unassisted reason. The absurdity of any attempt to attain either philosophical truth or political faultlessness by such contempt and oblivion of the past, has been demonstrated by many unhappy examples in the history both of nations and of literature. The most natural consequence of all such attempts is, that the inquirer neither sees nor avoids those first and usual errors into which human reason is most apt to fall, when it attempts to discover truth entirely by its own power; errors are thus needlessly revived, and even held up as great discoveries, which have already been often corrected or confuted. As for the total oblivion of all that has gone before us, that, as I have said above, is an impossibility; so impossible is it to erect any fabric of perfect and independent originality in philosophy, that Descartes is by no means the only one of these self-satisfied philosophers, whose most boasted and original opinions turn out, after all, to be mere new versions of what had been often said, in different words, by their predecessors. The borrowing is indeed unintentional, but it is produced by a mixture of imperfect self-deception, and obscured, but not extinguished, reminiscence. It is usually supposed to have been a great merit of Descartes, that he drew so perfect a line between spirit and matter. It must, however, appear unquestionably somewhat strange and surprising, that it should have been looked on as something so new and original to make a distinction between intellect and body; but, in truth, the mode in which Descartes made his distinction

was so unsatisfactory, and merely mathematical, that no good resulted from it, and the whole thoughts of those who adopted it were lost in inextricable difficulties, in the attempt to explain the connexion between soul and body, and their mutual influences upon each other. Philosophy continued, after the time of Descartes, to vacillate between the principle of personal consciousness, and the world of the senses, —one set of inquirers vainly endeavouring to explain every thing on the former; and another, still more absurdly, to deduce from the experience of the latter, even those doctrines of morality and theology with which it has not the smallest connexion. In every case, the true relation between the soul and the senses remained entirely incomprehensible, so long as men had lost all sight of that higher and godlike region upon which both depend, and from whose light both must first be illuminated and explained. We often hear Descartes praised for the mathematical precision with which he has, from reason alone, described the being of God. If this be a merit, in my opinion, it does not belong to him: it was an idea borrowed from those elder philosophers of the middle age, who were treated with so much contempt by Descartes and his age. It is true, that they considered the matter in a point of view quite different from that of Descartes and the period following their own. To the highest of all truths, of which, in a way peculiar to itself, we have also the most firm and fearless knowledge, and which forms, in fact, the animating spirit and central point of all other thoughts and impressions, even of all the active purposes and views of life,—to this truth these old philosophers attempted, with modesty and perseverance, to add the additional and far inferior arguments of reason. As every creature, or being in nature, makes known involuntarily, in one way or another, the inscrutable greatness of its Creator, so may also the human reason, otherwise so vain of itself, and its own powers, be permitted to join the general chorus which does honour to the Deity. As in human affairs, it is always looked upon as the highest triumph

of a good and right cause, when even its enemies and opponents are compelled to bear unwilling witness to its truth and excellence, so also may the reason of man be admitted to furnish evidence of divine truth. But if we attempt, after the manner of Descartes, to explain exclusively or chiefly from reason the being of God, which we must learn to comprehend from the suggestions of very different authority, we are, in fact, degrading God to a dependence upon reason, or at least to a companionship and equality with it. There never has been, nor ever can be, any successful attempt, after men have lost their respect for that other and higher authority, to demonstrate the existence of God to those who neither feel nor believe it.

The followers and disciples of Descartes founded a new sect in France, which for a short time maintained its supremacy. Yet there were not a few who, remaining independent, and even preserving their religious principles, embraced, nevertheless, as much of the Cartesian system as they imagined they could reconcile with their belief. This was, in many respects, the case with Malebranche, although he indeed was never able completely to get rid of those difficulties which Descartes had seen concerning the connexion between thought and its external objects, between spirit and matter. Huet acquired great fame as an opponent of Descartes, and a critical, acute, and philosophical defender of revelation; while, at the same time, Fenelon, without partaking, in any degree, of the peculiar philosophical and metaphysical contentions of his day, wrote in the most exquisite language, from no inspiration but that of his own amiable and Christian feelings. But religion owed her preservation much more to another distinguished Frenchman, whose name I have, as yet, purposely forborne to mention—this is Bossuet, a writer who, so far as eloquence and language are concerned, has always been considered as one of the first which his country has produced. It may, indeed, be matter of some doubt, whether the splendour of such eloquence as his be altogether an appropriate vehicle for the truths of religion,

whether the simplicity of our faith do not better accord with a more artless and unlaboured style of composition. But even if this should be so in the general, there can be no question, that at that particular period, as in every other period when religion is a matter of contest, and truth not entirely triumphant, a preacher, such as he was, possessed at once of the clearest and most comprehensive understanding, and of the most vigorous eloquence, must have been an acquisition of the highest importance to the cause he had undertaken to defend. Besides, we must recollect, that the eloquence of Bossuet was by no means confined to subjects, strictly speaking, theological; for whatever in life and in morality, in church and state, in politics and history, and in general, whatever in human affairs is calculated to lead the mind to serious reflection, was always regarded by this great man in a religious point of view, and considered as a fit subject of the eloquence of the pulpit.

If it may be permitted to compare an orator, so far as his language and composition are concerned, with poets, I think there is something in Bossuet which places him on a higher level than any of the poets which were his contemporaries. The perfection of style is enclosed in a very narrow sphere, between two extremes, that of the lofty and sublime, and the merely artificial; its charm consists in the mingling of these two elements. There is nothing more rare or difficult than to preserve this medium. On the one side there are many poets who are both great and sublime, but in whom there is a want of refinement, perfection, or, in general, of harmony. Others, in their anxiety to be polished, lean too much to the side of effeminacy and delicacy; they are noble and elegant, but not great; they want the strength which is necessary to constitute the sublime. Voltaire seems to have been well aware of this from the mode in which he criticises the two great tragedians, his predecessors, whom it was the highest ambition of his life to surpass. It was no difficult matter for him to detect, in Corneille, individual passages, wherein the language appears obsolete, rude, or



even corrupt and bombast. But it seems to me, that he had a higher reverence for the genius of this poet than for that of his rival, perhaps as bearing some resemblance to himself; and that he hoped, by his own fire and energy in passion, to surpass Racine, whom he held to be deficient in power and elevation. But, in truth, I apprehend that his opinion of Racine was not, upon the whole, a correct one; if we look only to the rhetoric of passion, among the crowd of French tragedies which have made that the chief object of their ambition, we shall, with difficulty, find any one which can sustain a comparison with the *Phedre*. The *Athalie* is animated with the force of another and yet higher inspiration. If in many of his other plays, as, for example, in *Berenice*, the chief excellence appears to consist in a harmonious repose of representation, and exquisite delicacy of characterising; this was rendered necessary by the nature of the fable. Yet this much may easily be conceded to Voltaire, that Racine would have been a greater and more perfect poet, had he united to the harmonious faultlessness of language and versification which he possessed, to that noble and graceful style which forms his peculiar beauty, here and there, somewhat more of that impetuous sublimity which often loses a great part of its effect on account of the profuseness with which it is lavished among the scenes of Corneille. So far as language and representation are concerned, and so far as an orator can be classed with poets, I think that this union of excellencies was possessed by Bossuet. With the strictest purity and refinement, with a style, the noble elegance of which has never been surpassed, he is master, whenever his subject requires it, of a greatness and sublimity which he never suffers to swell into the bombast. I am happy to agree with the most severe of the French critics in the judgment which they have formed respecting the high excellence of this man and his writings; and the more so, because they are not only examples of perfect style and expression, but also rich fountains of the most sublime and salutary truths.



There is yet another point in which the excellence of Bossuet as a writer and orator, even above the great poets of his age and nation, is sufficiently conspicuous. The French literature is, in many essential circumstances, fashioned after the model of the earlier refined nations of antiquity; it is in part grounded on this imitation, in the same manner that the Roman literature was upon the imitation of the Greek. This in itself is no reproach, and in a certain degree, indeed, is necessary with the literature of every nation whose refinement has a date subsequent to that of others, and more particularly whose spirit, like that of the Romans and the French, has been more directed to the external and practical life, than to the internal activity of intellect. It would be absurd to class the literature of the Romans, in regard to inventiveness of spirit, with that of the Greeks; but I have endeavoured to show how, notwithstanding its great inferiority in poetry and philosophy, the Roman feeling and idea of Rome, predominant in all its works and writers, have been sufficient to give it a character and excellence of its own. The same effect was produced on Bossuet by the religion which animated him, for his religion was no mere faith of custom, but the spirit of his life, and, as it were, a second nature, by which he was enabled to see and comprehend more clearly all the mysteries of the first. For this reason it is that he preserves all the independence of an original writer, and is the equal and rival, rather than the follower, of those ancients who were both his models in style, and the fountains of his learning and opinions. What the idea of their country and of the greatness of Rome was to the Romans, and what this idea gave to them even as writers, Christianity was, and gave, in a much higher degree, to Catholic France, during the period when the spirit of Bossuet was the ruling one. Religion was the free part of the soul, which enabled it to maintain itself unsubdued by the encroaching influences of the antique. So far, however, was this from being commonly the case, that the best poet which France at that time possessed, who was also the

most religious, stopped short in his career, before he had reached the point of perfection which he certainly might have attained, in consequence of the collision which took place between his ideas of Christianity, and his too exclusively antique notions in regard to the dramatic art. It is well known that Racine, after he had become completely penetrated with the opinions of the Jansensists, adopted ideas of absurd strictness respecting his own art, and even desisted from writing for the theatre. This excess of moral scrupulousness in the great poet, cannot fail to impress us with an amiable notion of the man, and that is indeed sufficiently confirmed by all that we know of his private history, and by the scope and tenor of his letters. And if it be true that he judged too severely of the capabilities of the theatre, it is unquestionably quite as true, that in the dramatic art and representation of his time, there were many things not very easily reconcilable with the doctrines and morality of the Bible. There was always a want of harmony between Christian sentiments and the vehicle in which they were conveyed. Upon the whole, there is the greatest reason to regret that Racine did not finish what he so well began in his *Athalie*, and demonstrate the possibility of making the drama of France a Christian drama, without diminishing its excellence. How great in these respects is the superiority of the Spanish poetry over the French! Among that thoroughly Catholic people, religion and fiction, truth and poetry, do not stand at variance from each other, but are all united in the most harmonious beauty.

The party of the Jansensists gave to France many distinguished writers, among whom I need only mention Pascal; but, upon the whole, I am convinced that the controversies which they introduced had any effect rather than a fortunate one on the French literature. I shall only recall to your recollection, in a very few words, the subject of most of their contests. It was a difficulty as old as human reason, and which human reason never can thoroughly explain—the nature of the free will of man, and its recon-

cilement with the necessity of nature—the omniscience and omnipotence of the Deity. This is a matter entirely subject to reason, and which of right, therefore, should never have been connected with religion. The judicious friends and defenders of Christianity have never pronounced any opinion respecting it, excepting only a negative one, to express their dislike of the two equally reprehensible extremes. But as in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the doctrines of free will, and the power of man's own exertions, in regard to his virtue, were so much brought forward, that he was represented as a being independent of God, and not requiring his aid, all the friends of Christianity were obliged to bestir themselves in order to get the better of this error; so in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their chief object was to combat those very opposite dogmatists who maintained that man, to obtain and fulfil all the purposes of his being, needs only to lay aside all exertion and all free will,—who adopted, in the main, the antique notions of dark and inflexible destiny, or at least the Mahometan ones of predestination and fatality. This controversy was in itself an useless one, but it was rendered far more hurtful than it needed to have been by the manner in which it was conducted. The Provincial Letters of Pascal have, in consequence of their wit, and the beauty of their language, become standard works in French literature; but if we would characterise them by their import and spirit, they form nothing more than a masterpiece of sophistry. He disdains none of the tricks of that dangerous art, by which he thinks he can render his opponents, the Jesuits, contemptible or odious. That violence was in many respects done to truth, those acquainted with the history of the time well know, but even although that had been much less frequently the case than it really was with Pascal, every one must admit that an author, such as he was, employed his genius in a very culpable manner, when he set the example of writing concerning religion in the tone of apparent levity and bitter sarcasm. At first, indeed, this mode was adopted by one

Christian against others, men whom he personally hated, although they were seriously religious, because they did not measure the truths of Christianity by the geometrical standard which he himself preferred. But how soon were the same weapons turned against religion itself. The witty and exquisitely expressed sophistry of Pascal, was an admirable but a dangerous model, copied with but too much success by Voltaire; and easily coupled by him with all the kindred artifices of Bayle—a genius of the highest order, who applied a most various erudition in order to throw out doubts, insinuations, mockeries, and jests, against religion, and to make his approaches on every side, like a treacherous underminer, towards the yet unshattered bulwarks of our faith.

In general the spirit of philosophy in the last part of the seventeenth century, leaned more and more to evil. We may learn from the example of Hobbes alone how much the new doctrines of Bacon, without any intention or fault of that great man himself, had the tendency to promote unbelief and materialism. But as yet the spirit of the time was not ripe enough to receive the doctrine of unlimited right in the strongest sense, as expressed in the *Leviathan*. In order to have preached with success such an atheistical view, both of the physical and political world, Hobbes should have come a century, or at least half a century later. Locke, on the other hand, received much greater favour, because his opinions were not so much at variance with the received moral principles and feelings of his time, and because the tendency of his book, although almost as greatly, was by no means so apparently irreligious. In truth his errors were the more dangerous, on account of the unsuspecting shape in which they made their appearance. It is quite evident that no higher kind of belief or hope can obtain a place, where every thing is enclosed within the narrow limits of the senses, and their experience. Locke himself, indeed, was a good Christian, but this is only one instance more, that he who first opens a new line of thought very seldom

pursues it so far as to perceive even its most inevitable consequences. If we adopt his principles, we must inevitably renounce all other thoughts, and limit ourselves to the feeling, the experience, and the enjoyment of the senses; and those who in later times have openly professed these notions, although they called themselves independent philosophers, were in truth only the disciples of Mr Locke. When men began to reflect somewhat more deeply on the proper subjects of this sensible experience, and then on the power which it possesses, and the effect which it produces, a mighty variety of doubts sprung up in every direction, particularly in England. The doctrine, that the only true knowledge is that shaped out by the senses and experience, is in general decided, although not openly expressed, materialism, and in France it very soon threw aside the veil, such as it was. Indirectly, and indeed entirely contrary to his wishes, Newton himself paved the way for the philosophy of the eighteenth century; for the defenders of the new opinions were proud of appealing perpetually to his authority; and thought, indeed, that after his stupendous discoveries in physics, nothing is so great but that it may be attained without the assistance of religion. Both Newton and Bacon would have turned away with disgust from those who professed to be their greatest admirers in the eighteenth century. These, indeed, with all their reverence for his philosophy, did not scruple to talk at times of his attachment to Christianity as a weakness in the mind of Newton. In many of his expressions concerning the Deity, and his connexion with nature, we may perceive the traces not merely of an animated feeling, but of a deep sentiment, marks that, though he was not, in strict speaking, a philosopher, and knew nothing of metaphysics, he had nevertheless thought, in an original manner, on all the highest subjects of reflection.

In the eighteenth century, the English were the first people of Europe, in literature as in every thing else. The whole of the modern French philosophy was produced by that of Bacon, Locke, and other Englishmen; at least, it borrowed all its

first principles from them. In France, however, it soon assumed an appearance quite different from what it had ever had in England. In Germany, on the other hand, the mighty regeneration of literature in the middle of this century, received its first impetus and ruling direction principally from the poetry and the criticism of the English.

Voltaire was the first who contributed, in a great degree, to bring the philosophy of Locke and Newton into France. It is singular with what a perversity of genius this man makes use of all the marvellous greatness of nature as revealed to him by the science of England, not for the purpose of exalting the character of the Creator, but for lowering that of men : how fond he is of dwelling on the insignificance of this earthworm, amidst the immeasurable splendours of stars and planets. As if the spirit, the thought which can comprehend all this universe of suns and stars, were not something greater than they ; as if God were some earthly monarch, who, among the millions over which he rules, may well be supposed never to have seen, and almost to have forgotten the existence of some paltry village on the border of his dominions. The eighteenth century in general made no use of the physical knowledge it inherited from the seventeenth, except one extremely hostile to the higher truths of religion. In Voltaire, indeed, there is no such thing to be found as any regular system of infidelity, scarcely even a single firm principle, or settled philosophical opinion, or even precise form of philosophical doubt. As the sophists of antiquity took a pleasure in showing the versatility and ingenuity of their spirit, by defending first one opinion and then the one exactly opposite to it, so Voltaire wrote one book in favour, and another in contradiction of Providence. Yet in so far is he sincere, that he cannot help letting us see very plainly which of these works is his own favourite. Throughout all his writings, whatever be their subject, he cannot resist any opportunity of introducing his impious wit, and showing his aversion for Christianity, and, in part at least, for all religion. In this point of view his



spirit operated as a corrosive and destructive engine for the dissolving of all earnest, moral, and religious modes of thinking. Yet it appears to me that Voltaire has done even more harm by the spirit and purpose which he has thrown over history, than by his derision of religion. He felt what was the defect of French literature in this department, as well as in that of poetry. Since the time of the Cardinal Retz, the abundance of historical memoirs, alike interesting from their subjects and the lively mode of their composition, had increased to such a degree, that they might almost be said to be a proper literature by themselves—and certainly to form one of the most brilliant parts of the whole literature of France. But in consequence of these memoirs, there is no doubt that history declined too much into the tone of conversation, became split into particulars, and lost itself at last, to the great injury of historical truth, in an endless variety of anecdotes. However delightful the perusal of such works may be, they are, after all, only the harbingers and materials of history, not histories, in the proper acceptation of the word. At least there is much space intervening between the best possible style of writing such anecdotes, and a style of historical composition such as that of the ancients was, or among the moderns, that of Machiavelli. The French literature possesses many excellent narratives, some well collected, and (even as pieces of writing) praiseworthy tracts, concerning the older history of the country, but no truly classical, national, and original work of history. Voltaire was very sensible of this defect in the literature of his nation, and with his usual vanity of universal genius, attempted to supply it himself. That in regard to art he was not entirely successful; that as a writer of history, even in respect to the mode of composition adapted for works of that kind, he can sustain no comparison, I do not say with the ancients, but even with the best English historians—Hume and Robertson; this is now universally admitted even in France itself. Nevertheless, the spirit in which he viewed history very soon acquired very great influence even



over English writers—particularly Gibbon—and became almost the ruling historical spirit of the eighteenth century. The essence of this mode of thinking in respect to history which proceeded from Voltaire, consists in expressing, on every opportunity, and in every possible form, hatred for monks, clergymen, Christianity, and, in general, for all religion. In regard to politics, its prevalent spirit is a partial, and, in the situation of modern Europe, an absurd predilection for the republican notions of antiquity, accompanied very frequently with an altogether false conception, or at least extremely imperfect knowledge of the true spirit and essence of republicanism. Among the followers of Voltaire this went so far as to take the appearance of a decided and bigoted hatred of all kingly power and nobility, and in general of all those modes of life and government which have been produced by what is called the feudal system; and all this, in spite of Montesquieu, who characterised and praised, with the acuteness and liberality of a true philosopher, what these comparatively ignorant writers were only capable of reviling. How much was set in a false light, how greatly historical truth was injured, and the whole of the past unworthily condemned, begins now to be discovered, since historical inquirers have adopted a more profound and accurate method of research. For after the philosophy of the eighteenth century had entirely accomplished its own destruction, and the religion which it would have overthrown had come victorious out of the struggle, every thing in history and in the past has begun to be seen in a more just and natural point of view. Yet there remain many falsifications, errors, and prejudices, with regard to past ages, which have still to be amended; for in no department did the philosophy of the last century so deeply and so extensively establish its influence as in history, where its wickedness and falseness are, of course, less observable to those who take facts upon trust, than when their spirit is brought distinctly forward in the shape of philosophical doctrine and opinion.

In regard to Voltaire, I must observe that he seems to have been actuated by motives of a personal nature, which render the spirit of his histories still more narrow and unjust. It is evidently his purpose to make us believe that all the ages before that of Lewis XIV. were ages of darkness, and that even then, all nations except his were mere hordes of barbarians. This much exalted monarch plays this important part in the historical and intellectual drama of Voltaire, because he, it seems, while the whole earth was wrapped in chaos and barbarism, was the first who pronounced a creative *FIAT LUX*. Yet the great writers of the time of Lewis, and even Newton and Locke, were, after all, only the first faint rays of the coming splendour. The mid-day sun of entire illumination and freethinking did not, according to Voltaire's opinion, manifest himself till somewhat later. But however inclined he was, in the general, to flatter the foolish vanity of his nation, yet, in many moments of mirth or displeasure, he spoke, either from levity or bitterness, in a very different tone, as, for example, in that well known saying of his, that "the character of a Frenchman is made up of the tiger and the ape." In other more moderate but not less caustic expressions, it is easy to see how thoroughly Voltaire had studied and comprehended his countrymen. But this was a piece of knowledge which he never displayed except by accident.

Even Montesquieu contributed towards the formation of this philosophy of the eighteenth century; principally, as I apprehend, because he neglected to give any rule or standard of unity to that immense collection of admirable political remarks and opinions which he laid before the world. This was exactly in compliance with what was then the usual fashion in every department of thought and action. The erudition, the genius and powerful reflections of this great and remarkable writer, contributed only to increase the general relaxation of all principle; for the spirit of the age, being furnished with no guiding rule, floated hither and thither amidst that vast sea of political facts and precepts,

like a ship without anchor or compass, upon the waves of the ocean.

The tendency to sublime and elevating thoughts, even to religious feelings and views, is so strong in our nature, and occasions to call these forth are so profusely scattered over the world around us, that we cannot be at all surprised to find that many of the great French naturalists remained entirely, or at least in a great measure, free from the prevalent spirit of irreligion, and have even here and there risen to a style of reflection much higher than that of their age. Although many of his opinions do not harmonise with revealed religion, and many others cannot stand the test of philosophy—although he himself was by no means free from the material fetters or the entirely physical system of philosophy which was then in fashion; yet I can never help considering the great Buffon as one who is entitled to be classed, at least in the way of comparison, with the better thinkers of the eighteenth century. Among the latter authors I may just allude to the zealous and intellectual Bonnet.

The social manners and constitution of modern Europe, and more particularly of France, had become, in very many respects, so remote from nature, that we can scarcely wonder that a restless and inquiring spirit should have gone entirely to the opposite extreme. But how little fitted admiration and respect for nature alone are to supply human life with a proper rule of conduct, the example of Rousseau affords a sufficient proof. In regard to the feeling and zeal which animated him, Rousseau, as a reasoner, is not only superior to Voltaire, and all other French philosophers of the last century, but of a class entirely different from them. The influence which he exerted over his age and nation was perhaps only on that account the more hurtful. It is only when a strong mind, striving passionately in quest of truth, pursues its researches in a wrong direction, and embraces error in room of it, that error assumes a form of real danger, and becomes capable of seizing possession of generous natures, whose general principles are in an unsettled state. The wit

of Voltaire contributed very much to unsettle and relax principle, and thereby paved the way for Rousseau. But this man's impetuous and overwhelming eloquence drew into the whirlpool of error many whom the mere sophistry of wit and pleasantry could never have led astray. It is true that at first Rousseau's pictures of savage life, and his theory of a pure democracy of reason, gave rise to more wonder than conviction. But as it was this man's fortune to become the founder of a new system and method of education, wherein the development of the individual man is supposed to be best conducted upon the isolated principle of seclusion, and entirely without regard to his situation as a citizen, we need not be astonished to find that at a somewhat later period even the wildest of his dreams about natural politics found both admirers and defenders. After having seen that the extension of physical science contributed very much, in its misapplied condition, to immorality, irreligion, and even atheism, it is no wonder that a direction equally culpable and dangerous was given by the philosophers of the eighteenth century to the improved knowledge of men and nations. But however much men might refine and adorn their descriptions of American savages, in order to promote the idea of the possibility of natural perfection, there remained always a few points in the testimony of every traveller which presented insurmountable difficulties to the admirers of barbarity. In Voltaire, on the other hand, and in many other French writers of his time, we may observe an equally absurd predilection, another extreme—one as far removed as can well be from the wild freedom of savages: I mean a passion for the Chinese, a people polished into perfect tameness and uniformity, and exhibiting the best specimen of what has since been called "the Despotism of Reason." An age which was perpetually endeavouring to substitute a complete system of police in the room of the antiquated influences of religion and morality, which regarded the perfection of a few manufactures as the sole and highest object of human society, and

what they called "the doctrine of pure ethics," as the *ne plus ultra* of illumination—an age such as this could scarcely indeed fail to contemplate, with mighty admiration, the spectacle of a nation which has, according to its own account, possessed for some thousand years laws without religion, which has had newspapers some centuries longer than ourselves, which can imprint upon porcelain colours more brilliant than we are acquainted with, and make paper thinner and finer than any European manufactory. It is lamentable to see into what contemptible perversities the misdirected ingenuity of a few rational men can conduct both themselves and their contemporaries.

Voltaire and Rousseau were the first who gave its form and shape to the spirit of the eighteenth century; but they had many coadjutors in their attempts, many who were indefatigable in rendering the moral philosophy of Locke more decided in its principles as well as bolder in its consequences, and in rendering it, so improved, the manual of the age. What results this produced in regard to human life, may be learned from the single example of Helvetius. This man proved to the satisfaction of his readers, that selfishness, vanity, and sensual enjoyment are the true and certain guides, the only rational ends of enlightened men, the only realities in human life—and his readers soon began to suspect that the same principles ought to be extended to the whole universe. Mind, according to this doctrine, there is none, for matter is every thing, and man is distinguished from the brutes, not by intellect, but by hands and fingers—advantages which, in some degree at least, he appears to share with the monkey. The difference between the man and the monkey was indeed diminished very much, in the opinion of many philosophers of this time, and it was a very favourite speculation to discover the existence of intermediate and connecting species between them. It is much to be regretted that Rousseau did not fulfil the intention he once expressed, of openly combating the dogmas of Helvetius. He must, in the course of such a controversy, have at least

been compelled to settle and explain somewhat more fully his own principles ; and these, however erroneous, possess, when compared with those of the other, much that is both good and noble, and capable of being improved.

The last step in the progress of the French ante-revolutionary philosophy, is that marked by the congenial spirit of Diderot. I may, without question, assume the fact, that this man was the centre point and animating principle, not only of the *Encyclopædia*, but also of the *Système de la Nature*, and of many other works connected in the same spirit of audacious atheism. He wrought indeed much more in secret than in public ; he was different from Voltaire and Rousseau in this, that he had less vanity of authorship than they, and was perfectly satisfied when he could gain the victory, without wishing to be personally held up as the victor. He was peculiarly distinguished by a most fanatical hatred, not only of all Christianity, but of all kinds of religion. He maintained that these are all alike founded in the superstitious terrors left on the minds of a half-destroyed race, by those terrible revolutions in the natural world, the traces of which are still so apparent around us. In many of the writings of this school, even the name of Atheism is not concealed, but it is openly stated that man can never be happy till he learns to throw aside the whole doctrine of a Deity—an opinion, the absurdity of which has been but too fatally demonstrated by the experience of a few subsequent years. Of all the forms in which this atheistical system was brought before the world, perhaps the most singularly extravagant was the theory which represented Christ as a mere astronomical symbol—a being never possessed of historical existence—and the twelve apostles as so many old signs of the zodiac. The whole spirit of this system, and the whole of the practical purposes which it was intended to serve, may be learned from the single well-known wish, of which the fathers of the revolution made no secret—“ that the last king might be burned on a funeral pile, composed of the body of the last priest.”

## LECTURE XIV.

LIGHTER SPECIES OF WRITING IN FRANCE, AND IMITATION OF THE ENGLISH—  
FASHIONABLE LITERATURE OF BOTH COUNTRIES—MODERN ROMANCE—THE  
PROSE OF BUFFON AND ROUSSEAU—POPULAR POETRY IN ENGLAND—MODERN  
ITALIAN THEATRE—CRITICISM AND HISTORICAL COMPOSITION OF THE ENGLISH  
—SCEPTICAL PHILOSOPHY—RETURN TO A BETTER AND HIGHER SPECIES OF  
PHILOSOPHY IN FRANCE—BONALD AND ST MARTIN—SIR WILLIAM JONES AND  
BURKE.

FROM the time of Louis XIV. the French language has always possessed great wealth in all these lighter species of writing whose inspiration consists of imagination and wit. Yet even in this respect the elder times were the more fortunate. No later writer of comedies has come near to Molière; the peculiar charm of La Fontaine, in his artless species of poetical narration, remains inimitable. Voltaire, who in his opinions and philosophy belongs so entirely to the later time, and was even the founder of its principles, so far as literature and poetry are concerned, is one of the elder school, and so forms a sort of point of connexion between it and the new. His success in comedy was far less than in tragedy; but he is quite unrivalled in his variety of miscellaneous, witty, and occasional poems of every kind. The minor poems and songs of the French had always this tendency to social wit and fashion, while those of the English, on the other hand, partook more of the true nature of lyrical poetry, and were distinguished by their depth of thought, and their tone of natural feeling in description. The more poetry attaches itself to the present, and the life of society, the more local does it become, and subject to the influences of fashion. Many comedies, romances, and songs produced in the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century, which are in themselves full of talent, and were in their day very celebrated in France,



have since become as obsolete as the manners and opinions of the society which they represent. Should the poetry of any nation confine itself entirely to these species, and to subjects exclusively modern—to dramatic pictures of manners without fable—to tales taken from the life of ordinary society—and witty occasional poems—it would be almost as impossible and absurd to attempt a historical or critical account of it, as to make a display of anatomical skill upon the ephemerides of a summer evening. The objects of these productions is nothing more than to fill up the idle hours of fashionable life and amusement; and even although, in order to fulfil this purpose, they may at times make use of feeling, passion, and original thoughts, their end still continues to be pastime—a thing which may be attained quite as well without poetry as with it.

It is true, without doubt, that in the miscellaneous and trifling species of poetry, there are to be found productions which bear as decidedly the stamp of genius as the first works of the epic poet or the tragedian. The beauty, however, is seldom so universal. It depends very often entirely upon expression, and its delicacies, things which can be more easily felt than explained. A heroic poem or a tragedy can be very well comprehended although translated into a different language, and in general the greater its intrinsic excellence is, the less does it suffer by such a transmutation. But I doubt whether any foreigner, however complete may be his familiarity with the French language, can ever sympathise, in its utmost extent, with the admiration which Frenchmen express for La Fontaine. Naïveté, elegance, and the stamp of genius, these every one must recognise in him, but a Frenchman feels and enjoys something still more exquisite than these, and this depends on the language, to an entire feeling of whose numberless peculiarities no foreigner ever can attain. Many even of the most celebrated characteristic pieces of Moliere are now become too antiquated for the stage and actual representation, and can be admired only in reading. However high we may be inclined to

place these as individual works, and in the scale of French poetry, their effects, as the beginning of a new species of writing, and as models for future artists, have been very far from fortunate. The characters of Labruyere or Theophrastus may be set forth in a dramatic form, but they can never become poetry. Even the rhetoric of the passions, when it forms the sole animation of the tragedy, is far from coming up to our ideas of what tragedy ought to be ; in like manner, the psychological wire-drawing of characters and passions in comedy furnishes a very unequal substitute for poetry and wit. The tendency to this extreme minuteness of characterisation has frequently formed a subject of reproach against the higher comedy of the eighteenth century. From it the change was by no means a difficult one to those ethical treatises in the shape of comedies, of which, unfortunately for his own nation, and still more so for ours, Diderot was the inventor.

The original French character is, I believe, quite as light and careless as it is usually represented ; but among the French books of the eighteenth century, I confess I can perceive very few traces of this, even in those situations where it might have appeared with the greatest propriety. This must be ascribed to the ever increasing spirit of philosophical and political sectarianism ; and even from the external history of the period it is quite easy to see why a passionate species of rhetoric came to acquire a complete predominance over the old trivial spirit of the French. The truth is, that the nation itself had undergone as great a change as its literature. The ruling philosophy of morals was indeed expressed by some poets in light and humorous strains ; but it carried most by much too far, and quite beyond all the limits of poetry. Materialism is essentially inimical to poetry, and deadening to fancy. The magic of the muse must lose all its power over one who is thoroughly penetrated with the degrading doctrines of Helvetius.

On the other hand, the passion for freedom, and the adoration of nature, which, chiefly by means of the followers of

Rousseau, became predominant in the new philosophy, were not easily to be reconciled with the formal accuracy of the elder French poetry in the seventeenth century. From this circumstance there arose an internal conflict, and enduring struggle to get rid of the ancient authority ; and this broke out in an open rebellion of taste, and produced an entire, although perhaps only a transitory, anarchy in literature, even before the period of the political revolution : hence the predilection for the poetry of England. Even Voltaire had much use of it in particular instances, not only without acknowledgment, but in the midst of perpetual sarcasms against Milton and Shakespeare. In all the French efforts in the higher walks of poetry, this influence of the English is even in our own times sufficiently apparent. The desire to give tragedy a greater freedom of construction and more of historical import, without however entirely laying aside the old system, is still undiminished, although it has never as yet produced any very considerable results. The last works of elevated poetry which have acquired a classical reputation in France are descriptive poems of the species peculiar to England. But of all species of writing, none was so much the favourite of the literati of the new school as the romance ; for whatever fetters might have been imposed on all the regular forms of poetical composition, this at least remained perfectly free. When Voltaire clothed his wit in this form, when Rousseau embodied in it his enthusiasm and his eloquence, when Diderot chose to make it the vehicle of his immortality, romance became, in the hands of each of these men of genius, exactly what he found it most convenient for himself to make it. The two first of them had many followers, who attempted to embody a similar spirit in the form of a more regular narration, and under the guise of a more exact delineation of the present modes of life. No one is ignorant into how many romances the principles and opinions of *Candide* have been wrought. Others were more the imitators of Rousseau ; among these, not a few who partook in his passion for nature, have chosen to

lay the scene of their fictions among the wildernesses of America—regions in which they might certainly consider themselves as quite free from the domestic tyranny of Aristotle and Boileau. The most distinguished of these are Bernardin de St Pierre, and Chateaubriand.

Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot made use of the romance very frequently, merely because they knew not in what other form they could so conveniently express certain philosophical opinions. But if we regard romance as a species of poetry, and as the regular representation in narration of incidents taken from actual life and manners, it is quite evident that the French have even in this species of writing been the imitators of the English, although I am far from thinking that they have attained equal excellence with them. In invention and power of representation, perhaps Richardson may be entitled to the first place. Although this writer has already become antiquated and obsolete both at home and abroad, although his attempts at the higher species of poetic fiction are in the main unsuccessful, and although his extreme copiousness is vulgar and disagreeable, we should, I suspect, attribute the decline of his popularity to any thing rather than a deficiency of genius. The species of writing which he adopted is a false one, and even a more powerful genius than that of Richardson could not easily get over the difficulties which it presents. Among the modern imitators of Cervantes, the most accomplished are Fielding and Smollet. Of all the romances in miniature, (and perhaps this is the best shape in which romance can appear,) the *Vicar of Wakefield* is, I think, the most exquisite. That other species of romance, of which the purpose is not narration but humour, and which loses itself in the mere play of wit and sentiment, was carried by its first inventor, Sterne, to a point of excellence at which none of his French imitators have arrived.

If we must give an opinion of those works of intellect which serve the purposes of mere fashion and daily use, as we should of any other species of fashionable manufacture,

I think the common run of English novels and romances are as much superior to the common run of the French, as Smollet and Fielding are superior to the best of the French novelists.

I must not omit to mention one circumstance which has been extremely unpropitious to French romance ; I allude to the extraordinary abundance, in this literature, of memoirs, confessions, books of letters and anecdotes, all more or less partaking in the nature of the romance. I am not aware that any tale of Marmontel has ever excited so universal an interest as his memoirs ; and I am quite sure that no French romance ever produced half so much effect as the *Confessions of Rousseau*.

In general, poetry, during the eighteenth century, was driven out of fashion in France by prose ; this, we must admit, although not without many great errors and faults, was rich, and in the hands of the most eminent writers was developed with the highest power and eloquence. Voltaire's style in prose is animated and witty like himself ; it is perfectly adapted to him and his purposes. The more severe French critics disapprove of his prose, and in history, indeed, I think it is by no means a suitable one. Many Germans find something very delightful to them in the style of Diderot, and I agree with them that he shows a perception and feeling of the more delicate beauties of imitative art by no means common among the writers of his country ; but his language is incorrect and hasty, and wholly devoid of that pure elegance which characterises the witty writings of the best French authors. In respect to style, Buffon and Rousseau are justly regarded with the highest admiration. The former is perhaps the richest and most graceful of the two ; but he was so much fettered by the nature of his work, that he never could introduce his rhetoric without an episode, and this has destroyed in a great measure the effect which he was fitted by nature to produce. It may appear natural enough that he should have given his theory of love in the article *Dove*. But we could scarcely have looked for a

retorical treatise on the subject of the dispersion of nations under the word *Hare*. Aristotle allowed himself no such liberties in his capacity of natural historian. As a scientific writer Buffon can sustain no comparison with the illustrious Greek whom it was his chief ambition to rival. Upon the whole, I coincide with those who give the preference to Rousseau over Buffon; for, although his style is in particular respects equally defective, there is more unity of purpose, and a more eloquent flow of composition in his works. His charm lies much more in this last peculiarity, than in the extraordinary beauty of individual passages. My feelings perfectly accord with those who esteem Rousseau the first of all the French writers of the last century, in regard to skill and power of eloquence; but I must not conceal from you that I, nevertheless, look upon the beauty of his composition as holding a place extremely below the sublime oratory of Bossuet.

Should the present condition of affairs ever be altered, and the superiority of prose over poetry in the language and literature of France become less tyrannical; in other words, should poetry ever revive among the French, I am clearly of opinion that their best means of attaining great excellence will consist, not in any strict imitation of English models, or of any foreign models whatever, but in a hearty recurrence to the old spirit and poetry of their own nation. The imitation of another nation can never be perfectly successful, for the most perfect productions of this nation remain always foreign to those who make them their models. Every nation has enough in its power when it can go back to its own original and most ancient poetry and legends. The further back we go in history, the more intimate do we find the connexion between different nations to be. But it is in the very first ages of national existence that the foundations both of national character and national poetry are laid.

In England, at the beginning of last century, the leaning towards a French taste in poetry was still evident; its in-

fluence is apparent in the elaborate versification of Pope, and in the tragedy which Addison wrote with a view to promote what he conceived to be more just ideas concerning poetical theory among his countrymen. Yet both of these authors contributed in no small degree towards bringing Shakespeare and Milton out of oblivion. Pope's translation of Homer, however remote it may be from the simplicity of the old bard, increased, nevertheless, the general love for this great poet of nature and antiquity, and is itself a proof of the existence of this love. In the original poems of Pope we can perceive abundant traces of that predilection for thought which has rendered didactic poetry so much a favourite among the English. I have already expressed my belief that this species contains always something of the frigid and unpoetic; and England has furnished another example that, such as it is, it becomes very soon exhausted. The common materials of didactic poetry were, however, often combined, in England, with the more poetical elements of passion and melancholy; as, for example, in the gloomy and enthusiastic Young. Thomson expressed his feelings more tastefully and beautifully in that species of poetry so much loved by his countrymen, and, after his own time, so much copied by foreigners—the descriptive. The passion for nature was the origin of the national love of Ossian; and although neither the sorrow of Ossian nor the despair of Young be every where prevalent, the spirit of serious meditation is certainly much more diffused over the lyrical poems of England during the eighteenth century, than even those of France. By the side of the ever increasing veneration of Shakespeare, there grew up, chiefly in consequence of the writings of Percy, a passionate love for the old ballads and popular poems. The more of these were discovered, (and the wealth of the Scots in particular is almost boundless,) the more did the love of them overcome that of every other kind of writing, and engross the whole of the English literature, with the single exception of romances and plays for daily use. In France, then, at the end of the seventeenth



and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the higher kinds of poetry were cultivated in a manner too regular and precise, and gradually sunk into the tone of social wit. In England, on the other hand, serious thoughts and poetical descriptions of natural scenery were the chief materials at the commencement of the last century, and, at its close, the universal passion was for the ancient national ballads—melancholy echoes of the lost poetry of a more heroic time. Those acquainted with the modern literature of England are well aware how this propensity has been fostered by the genius of the poets who are our own contemporaries.

Upon the whole, during last century, the state of poetry was a very poor one, at least when compared with the riches of antecedent times, even in countries where poetry is intermingled with all the enjoyments of life, as in Spain; or where the spirit of art forms almost the character of the nation, as in Italy. In this last country, however, although the higher species of poetry produced no new works worthy of being placed by the side of those of the more ancient period, the theatre, at least, was more successful and fruitful than it ever before had been. In Metastasio, Goldoni, Gozzi, Alfieri, we may discover, in a separate state, all those elements of a poetical drama, which, in a more blended condition, characterise our own stage. In Metastasio we find the highest musical beauty of language; in Goldoni common life is represented in a light and delightful manner, with those airy accompaniments of masking and carnival which appear natural to an Italian. In Gozzi's fantastic popular stories, and plays of witchcraft and *spectacle*, we can perceive an abundance of the true poetical power of invention; but there is a great want of that musical harmony and elegance of fancy which are requisite before invention can take just possession of the stage. In the dramas of Alfieri, an attempt is made to revive the sublimity of the antique; an attempt so noble that it is well worthy of great praise, even when it is not entirely successful.

I am not certain but the same remark which I made a few

pages back, respecting the comparative merits of the modern French and English romances, might be with equal propriety applied to their modern dramas. Both are mere species of manufacture, and I think the English are rather the best of the two. The Italian theatre lies much nearer ourselves, both in regard to external shape and later development.

The critical books of the English, and in particular most of their treatises concerning poetry and the imitative arts, are distinguished by greater freedom, originality, and knowledge of the antique, and bear, on these accounts, more affinity to our own modes of thinking than those of the French. Although, however, our German criticism certainly received its first impulse from the study of the English works of Harris, Home, Hurd, Watson, &c., we soon became sufficiently independent of these ; and, perhaps, in no department of our literature is there so much originality as in this.

Of all the works connected with elegant literature which the English produced during the last century, by far the most important are their great historical writings. They have, in this department, surpassed all the other European nations ; they had, at all events, the start in point of time ; and have become the standard models both in France and in Germany. The first place is, I believe, universally given to David Hume. But however salutary may be the spirit of scepticism in the conduct of historical researches, I am strongly of opinion that this spirit, when it is not confined to events alone, but extends its doubts to all the principles of morality and religion, is by no means becoming in a great national historian, and will, in the end, diminish in a very considerable measure the influence which the native genius of this singular man might well have entitled him to maintain over the minds of his countrymen.

Narrow principles and views of things not perfectly just, are, I am free to confess, in my estimation, much better fitted for a great historian than no principles at all, and a deadening want of feeling, warmth, and passion. When

these are removed, the only remaining means of creating interest in a historical work is the love of opposing the ruling opinions, and of paradoxy. The leaning to this species of opposition is most evident in Hume. However praiseworthy and salutary it might be, that such a writer as Hume was, should take up a set of opinions opposed to those of the Whigs—a party in this day, as well as in our own, possessed of perhaps too much influence over the literature of England—and should represent a most important part of the British history with a predilection for the unfortunate house of Stuart, and the principles of the Tories; it is evident, that had he written without any such views, he might have attained to an eminence far beyond that which he has reached, and descended to posterity, not as the first of all party writers of history, but as the author of a truly great national work, the spirit and excellence of which should have been equally admired and appreciated by all the English. In his treatment of the elder periods of the English history, he is quite unsatisfactory and meagre; he had no love for its antiquities, and could not transport himself back into the spirit of remote ages.

In regard to style, few writers of any country can sustain a comparison with Robertson; his expressions are select and elegant, but always clear and unlaboured. But he is very inferior in respect to other matters of far greater importance,—the research and import of his histories. The English themselves are now pretty well convinced that he is a careless, superficial, and blundering historian, although they study his works, and are right in doing so, as models of pure composition, extremely deserving of attention, during the present declining state of English style. To speak from my own feelings, I think Robertson, although upon the whole a beautiful writer, is too fond both of verbosity and of antithesis. The ambition of fine writing, and of the desire to treat matters in an elaborate and oratorical manner, appear to me to be extremely erroneous and out of place in a writer of history. If historical composition is to be con-

sidered merely as a display of writing, no modern author need ever flatter himself with the least hope, I do not say of equalling, but of approaching the great historians of antiquity. We have it in our power, however, to surpass them in another way, namely, by considering history in a more scientific manner, and making use of those opportunities and instruments of information in which our times are so much superior to those of Greece and Rome. If we make this our object, the best style which we can adopt is the most simple; we should write clearly and carefully, but avoid all appearance of artifice, superfluity, affectation, or ambitiousness.

Gibbon is a writer full of thoughts; his language is in general powerful and exquisite, but it has, to a great excess, the faults of elaborateness, pompousness, and monotony. His style is full of Latin and French words and phrases. The English language, as being of so very mixed a nature, and as possessing such a variety of words and phrases, and constructions—Latin, French, and domestic, has no very exact standard to regulate the proportion of the different elements which are placed at the disposal of those who use it. That elaborate and half-Latin manner of writing by which Gibbon is distinguished, had before him been brought very much into fashion by the example of the critic Johnson; in principle at least the English have now departed from it, and speak of it as a false species, and hostile to the spirit of their language. The work of Gibbon, however instructive and fascinating it may be, is nevertheless at bottom an offensive one, on account of his deficiency in feeling, and his propensity to the infidel opinions and impious mockeries of Voltaire. These are things extremely unworthy of a historian, and in the periodic and somewhat cumbrous style of Gibbon they appear set off to far less advantage than in the light and airy compositions of his master. He never seems to be naturally a wit, but impresses us with the idea that he would very fain be one if he could. Although I have mentioned some faults which I think I perceive in each of these three great writers, yet their general excellence is not to be

disputed, and is felt by none more deeply than myself; they appear indeed to great advantage with whomsoever we compare them, and never more so than when we turn from their writings to those of their followers and imitators. With all the abundance of his Italian elegance, what is the overloaded and affected Roscoe when compared with Gibbon? Coxe, although master of a good and classical style, resembles Robertson in no respect so much as in the superficialness of his researches; and the statesman Fox has nothing in common with Hume but the bigotry of his party zeal. The art of historical writing is evidently quite on the decline in England. One great cause of this consists, I imagine, in the want of any stable and satisfactory philosophy—a defect sufficiently apparent even in the three great writers whom I have enumerated. Without some rational and due conceptions of the fate and destiny of man, it is impossible to form any just and consistent opinion, even concerning the progress of events, the development of times, and the fortunes of nations. In every situation, history and philosophy should be as much as possible united. Philosophy, if altogether separated from history, and destitute of the spirit of criticism, which is the result of the union to which I have alluded, can become nothing more than a wild existence of sect and formality. History, on the other hand, without the animating spirit of philosophy, is merely a dead heap of useless materials, devoid of internal unity, proper purpose, or worthy result. The want of satisfying and sane views and principles, is nowhere more conspicuous than in those histories of mankind, as they have been called, originally produced in England, and more recently written among ourselves. From the immense storehouse of travels and voyages, a few facts are collected, which make up loose portraits of the fisher, the hunter, the emigration of the early nations, and the different conditions of agricultural, pastoral, and commercial peoples. This is called a view of the history of mankind, and there is no doubt that it contains many individual points of great interest and importance, with

respect to the progress and habits of our species. Such would be the case, even if we should treat of men entirely according to their corporeal subdivisions of white, black, red, and brown. But how little is gained by all this as to the only real question, an answer to which should form the proper history of mankind! How little do we learn as to the origin and proper state, or the present lamentable and fallen condition of human nature! The answer to this question, which is the essence of all history, can only be supplied by religion and philosophy; that philosophy, I mean, which has no other ambition and no other end but to support religion. In these false histories of mankind, the worthy offspring of the degraded and material philosophy of the eighteenth century, the predominant idea is always, that man sprung originally from the dust like a mushroom, and differed from it only by the possession of locomotive power and of consciousness. The ambition of their authors is to represent us as originally brutes, and to show how, by the progress of our own ingenious contrivances, art has been added to art, and science to science, till our nature has gradually reached the high eminence on which it now stands. The greater intimacy of connexion can be established between us and the ourang-outang, (that favourite of so many philosophers of the last century,) the more rational are supposed to be our opinions concerning our species, and its history.

The philosophy of sensation, which was unconsciously bequeathed to the world by Bacon, and reduced to the shape of a regular system by Locke, first displayed in France the true immorality and destructiveness of which it is the parent, and assumed the appearance of a perfect sect of atheism. In England it took a different course; in that country it could not indeed be supposed likely to produce the same effects, because the old principles of religion were regarded as far too intimately connected with national welfare, to be easily abandoned. The spirit of English thought was moreover naturally inclined to adopt the paradoxical and sceptical side of this philosophy rather than the mate-

rial and atheistical. The most singular phenomenon in the whole history of philosophy is perhaps the existence of such a man as Berkeley, who carried the system of Locke so far, as utterly to disbelieve the existence of the external world, and yet continued all the while a devout Christian bishop. How external objects come into contact with our intellect, so that it forms notions of them—this was a point upon which the philosophy of that time neither came nor could come to any satisfactory conclusion. All that we perceive or feel of these things, is after all only an impression, a change upon ourselves. We may pursue it as far as we will; we can lay hold on only such a notion or perception of an object, not the object itself,—that seems, the more we seek it, to fly the further from us. If we consider nature, as either itself animated, or as the medium instrument and expression of life, then this perplexity is at an end, and every thing becomes clear. We have no difficulty in conceiving, that between two living and mutually operating spiritual natures, there may exist a third nature apparently inanimate, to serve as the bond of connexion and mutual operation, to be their word and language, or to serve as the separation and wall of partition between them. We are familiar with such an idea, from our own experience, because we cannot have any intercourse of thought with our brother men, or even analyse our thoughts, except through the operation of exactly similar means. The simple conviction, however, that the sensible world is merely the habitation of the intellectual, and a medium of separation as well as connexion between intellectual natures, had been lost along with the knowledge and idea of the world of intellect, and the animating impression of its existence. The philosophy of the senses stumbled, in this way, at the very threshold, and proceeded to become more and more perplexed in every step of its progress. Berkeley believed that the external world has no real existence, and that our notions and impressions of it are directly communicated to us by the Deity. From the same doubts Hume fell into a



totally different system, the sceptical,—a philosophy which humbles itself before its doubts, and denies the possibility of attaining knowledge. This man, by the penetrating and convulsive influence of his scepticism, determined the future condition of English philosophy. Since his time nothing more has been attempted than to erect all sorts of bulwarks against the practical influence of this destructive scepticism : and to maintain, by various substitutes and aids, the pile of moral principle uncorrupted and entire. Not only with Adam Smith, but with all their later philosophers, national welfare is the ruling and central principle of thought,—a principle excellent and praiseworthy in its due situation, but quite unfitted for being the centre and oracle of all knowledge and science. The two great substitutes to which I allude are neither scientifically nor practically of a durable and effective nature. Common sense is poor when compared with certain knowledge, and moral feeling is a very inadequate foundation for a proper system of ethics. Were the common sense of man even as sound and universal as these English reasoners maintain, if we should take its conclusions for the last, and subject them to no higher review, we should find it more likely to cut than to unloose the knot of the great questions in philosophy. The innate curiosity of man is not to be so satisfied, but however frequently we may put it off, returns to the charge with undiminished pertinacity. Moral feeling and sympathy are things too frail and uncertain for a rule of moral action. We must have, in addition to these, an eternal law of rectitude, derived not from experience and feeling, but from reason or from God. A fair and unshaken faith is indispensable for our welfare. But the faith which the English philosophers have established upon the dictates of common sense and moral feeling, is, like the props upon which it leans, uncertain and unworthy of our confidence. It is not worthy of the name of faith : the name applied to the impression made upon us by reason and external experience, and with equal propriety to the impressions we receive in a totally different way from

the internal voice of conscience and the revelations of a superior nature. That which is called faith among these men is nothing more than weak and self-doubting faith of necessity,—a thing as incapable of standing the test of time, as the frail faith of custom is to resist the arguments of unprincipled sophistry. This nation is powerful and free in its whole being and life. Even in poetry it regards the profound and internal rather than the outward and ornamental, but by means of its own errors it is cramped and confined in its philosophy. In regard to this mighty department of human intellect and exertion, the English of later times are neither original nor great; they even appear to be fundamentally inferior to some of the best writers among the French. If a few authors in England have pursued an intellectual path of their own, quite different from the common one, they have exerted no powerful, or at least no extensive, influence over their fellow-countrymen. The attempts with which I myself am acquainted do not indeed display genius such as might entitle them to much consideration.

We may compare the mode of philosophical thought in England, to a man who bears every external mark of health and vigour, but who is by nature prone to a dangerous distemper. He has repressed the first eruptions of the disease by means of palliatives, but the evil has on that very account had the more leisure to entwine itself with the roots of his constitution. The disease of philosophical error and unbelief can never be got the better of, unless by a thorough and radical cure. I think for this reason that it is extremely probable, nay, that it is almost certain, England has yet to undergo a mighty crisis in her philosophy, and of necessity, in her morality and her religion.

If we regard not so much the immediate practical consequences, but rather the internal progress of intellect itself, we shall be almost compelled to think error is less dangerous when open and complete, than when half-formed and disguised. In the midst of moderate errors our self-love keeps

us ignorant of our danger. But when error has reached its height, it is the nature of the human mind to promote a reaction, and to rise with new strength and power out of the abyss into which at last it perceives itself to have fallen.

Such a return, and certainly a most remarkable one, to the truth and true philosophy, has occurred of late years in France. After that altar, upon which, shortly before, reason, the goddess of the age, was worshipped, more appropriately than her devotees suspected, under the shape of an actress or a harlot,—after this altar had been purified, and religion restored,—after a church without a creed and the chimera of *Theophilanthropy* had been reduced to their original nothingness, the voice of oppressed and persecuted truth began on every side to make itself heard. I do not mean to refer in any particular way to that one celebrated writer who has consecrated his powerful eloquence entirely to the service of his religion. For however useful Chateaubriand may have been by representing Christianity in her most amiable form and her beneficial consequences, nay, however necessary such a writer as he is may have been to break the ice of infidelity in France, he has attached far too much to the sensible and external part of religion, and I suspect, indeed, has never penetrated into the deep and proper essence of our Christianity.

Many attempts have been made in a quite different way, to enlarge the mode of thinking, and establish a higher species of philosophy in France. Even the efforts which have been made to introduce and naturalise the spirit of our German philosophers are worthy of much attention. They have been supported by the genius and erudition of several of the first and most celebrated Frenchmen of the age. The attempt, indeed, is still opposed by many serious and almost insurmountable obstacles. Perhaps the Germanising French scholars have plunged too widely into the whole of our literature, instead of thoroughly mastering, in the first instance, the principles and essence of our philosophical

systems. A still more important difficulty is presented by the lingering tone of infidel thought, with which the general body of the nation is still, I fear, infected. The political establishment and external observances of religion are not sufficient for the purpose. Philosophy must proceed from, and return to, a sincere, and unalterable, and undoubting faith.

What I view as the most essential and important change in French literature of these last years, is the return to a higher morality, and that united system of Platonic and Christian philosophy, which stands exactly in the opposite extreme from the atheism of the preceding age. In some measure, even before the Revolution, and even in the period of the most entire corruption, this return had been begun. But it was not till after the whole system of thought had undergone a convulsion, that it began to manifest its perfect influence. A few philosophers, cut off from their age, and superior to it, France at all times possessed. I may refer in the first place, to Hemsterhuys, who, although not a Frenchman by birth, wrote entirely in this language; and that, too, with so much grace and harmony, that even in this point of view his Socratic dialogues are worthy of the noble spirit of Platonism and Christianity which they express. The return has, however, been most of all promoted by two very remarkable philosophers, men in all their views and principles thoroughly Christian. Of the one of these, St Martin, many writings were known even before the Revolution, and he was spoken of by the name of *the unknown philosopher*; the other, Bonald, has since that time become the best and most profound champion of the old French monarchical constitution. Both, along with their good and excellent qualities, have many great and essential errors. They are full of French prejudices, and although despisers of the spirit of their own age, they have so much partaken in it as to be very unfit judges of ages and nations different from their own. Even the most essential parts of their philosophy bear witness at what period they wrote,

and have a share of the spirit of the eighteenth century. The chief error of St Martin consists in this, that he viewed religion entirely as a matter of individual revelation, and as having no connexion whatever with forms and the external church of God. For this, in the situation of things immediately before or during the Revolution, there might, indeed, be some apology; but the error is in itself a dangerous one, and has prevented, in a great measure, the powerful genius of St Martin from producing the effect which might otherwise have been expected to follow its exertions. He belongs to the adherents of that oriental and Christian philosophy, which, as I have already said, although despised and ridiculed by doctors and universities, has, ever since the Revolution, been making silent but sure progress in the spirit of the age. However little of the praise of invention may be due to St Martin, and however much of error may be mingled with all his ideas, it still must remain a very remarkable circumstance, that at the period when France was most filled with atheism, an unknown and solitary philosopher should have arisen, who devoted the whole of his talents to destroy the atheistical philosophy of the time, and substitute in its place the doctrines of divine revelation and ancient tradition—a Mosaic and Christian system of philosophy. It is no less remarkable, that at the very commencement of our century, while others were restoring religion merely for political purposes, and with a view to maintain the faith of the ignorant, a learned jurist and political philosopher like Bonald should have seriously made the attempt to found the theory of justice upon God alone, and that of government on the doctrines of the Bible. In a philosophical point of view, we may blame him for having too much confounded and identified revelation with reason. But we must remember that he wrote in a country where these had been treated as not only distinct but irreconcilable means of knowledge. Many champions of Christianity have injured themselves by their too indiscriminating rejection of all philosophy. Bonald goes into the other extreme; he

errs by making Christianity too rational, and almost resolving it into reason. Truth itself, when waging war with error, is apt to go to the opposite extremity, and to regard the arguments of its adversaries in too narrow a point of view. After such errors and principles as those of the last century were, it is no wonder that the human mind should have received a shock sufficient to render it incapable of moving at once firmly and independently even in a better way. Such appears to have been the case with these illustrious Frenchmen, Bonald and St Martin.

Such a radical change in philosophy cannot easily occur in England. The great incidents of external life, commerce, and the British constitution, India and the Continent, engross the active intellect of this most active of all countries. There remains no talent or time for those pursuits of deeper thought and philosophy, in which, for these very reasons, the English are inferior at this moment to the French. Even in our own days, however, there has been no want of illustrious writers, of men alike distinguished by research and eloquence, in England—these stand alone as tokens of the changing spirit of our time. William Jones has as yet had no rivals in the department which he selected; no one appears to have comprehended, as he did, the antiquities of Asia, and, above all, of India, with the acuteness of a philosopher, or to have seen the mode of reconciling every thing with the doctrine and history of the Scriptures. Were such paths pursued with spirit and power, the usual prejudices and fetters of British thought might be easily got rid of. But if we are to praise a man in proportion to his usefulness, I am persuaded that no task could be more difficult than that of doing justice to another Englishman, his contemporary, the statesman and orator Burke. This man has been to his own country, and to all Europe—in a very particular manner to Germany—a new light of political wisdom and moral experience. He corrected his age when it was at the height of its revolutionary frenzy; and without maintaining any system of philosophy, he seems to have

seen further into the true nature of society, and to have more clearly comprehended the effect of religion in connecting individual security with national welfare, than any philosopher, or any system of philosophy of any preceding age.

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## LECTURE XV.

RETROSPECT—GERMAN PHILOSOPHY—SPINOSA AND LEIBNITZ—GERMAN LANGUAGE AND POETRY IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURIES—LUTHER, HANS SACHS, JACOB BOHME—OPITZ, THE SILESIAN SCHOOL—CORRUPTION OF TASTE AFTER THE PEACE OF WESTPHALIA; OCCASIONAL POETRY—GERMAN POETS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—FREDERICK THE SECOND; KLOPSTOCK; THE MESSIAH AND NORTHERN MYTHOLOGY—THE CHIVALROUS POEMS OF WIELAND—INTRODUCTION OF THE ANCIENT METRES OF QUANTITY INTO THE GERMAN LANGUAGE; DEFENCE OF RHYME—ADELUNG, GOTTSCHED, AND “THE (SO CALLED) GOLDEN AGE”—FIRST GENERATION OF THE LATER GERMAN LITERATURE, OR “THE PERIOD OF THE FOUNDERS.”

To some of my hearers it may appear as idle and superfluous to write against the philosophy of the eighteenth century, as it would be to fight with the shadow of a departed enemy. In truth, however, the cases are not at all parallel ones, although I can easily suppose they may seem so to such as form their judgments entirely from the external appearances of things. The evil is by no means annihilated, although it has become less visible. In England the disease of the age never broke out openly, and for that very reason has never been radically cured. In that country, as in France, there are a few illustrious exceptions and symbols of a self-regenerating age; symptoms of a gradual return from error, and the invincible power and majesty of truth. But I fear those who are best able to judge will agree with me in suspecting that the general tone of thought, particularly among those who have the empire of literature in their hands, is not yet altered. Among the latest writers



of France, the prevalence of the old system is still manifest ; the world and all its phenomena are still explained upon the old principles of the atomical and material philosophy. Of all the foolish hypotheses which have ever cheated the human intellect with the empty show of explanation, that of materialism is the most unsatisfactory. In a scientific point of view, it is void of foundation, and fantastic ; in regard to morality, national welfare, and religion, its influences are utterly unworthy and pernicious. Although this system is now seldom pursued to its consequences, and although experience has convinced all men how dangerous these inevitably are, yet we have still before our eyes the miserable spectacle of men entitled to every respect as natural philosophers, and justly occupying a high place in the intellectual scale of our age, who disgrace all their knowledge by the most lamentable and childish ignorance respecting whatever is most truly worthy of the name of philosophy. The cause of truth is gaining strength every day, but these men are not ashamed to advocate, at least by insinuations and calumnies, the cause of her adversary. Such is the situation of affairs abroad. Here, in Germany, the common disease of the century, the false philosophy, and the mania for reason, assumed quite a different appearance—a form of more temperance, and perhaps of less practical danger. We should err very much, nevertheless, if we should imagine that the evil does not exist, or flatter ourselves that our disease is entirely vanquished, merely because the symptoms have undergone a change.

If the German philosophy did not fall into such violent extremes as the French, it was not guarded by the same strong feelings of nationality, whose influence I have already described upon the English. The sentiment of national union had before this time become quite extinct among the subjects of our innumerable petty states. But perhaps the very smallness of our states was in some measure the cause of our security. Every thing was conducted upon so small a scale, and was so much in the view of men, that no open

or audacious adoption of any pernicious systems of injustice, such as those of Hobbes or Machiavelli, could be ventured upon. Still, however, in private life, manners certainly were becoming more relaxed, and so paving the most easy way for vicious theory. But the circumstance which preserved the German philosophy, at its commencement, from falling into the extreme of error, was, I imagine, the erudition of the German writers. These were in general full of recollections and ideas of that philosophy of antiquity which had become entirely forgotten in France and England. Leibnitz was, in this point of view, a great blessing to his country. It is very true that he was a physician who made use of palliatives, but was incapable or unambitious of effecting a radical cure; yet even this was much if we consider the wants of the time. He was a scholar as well as a philosopher, and his works contain innumerable points which call us back to those who preceded him. It is perhaps the chief fault of Leibnitz that he is too fond of reviving exploded difficulties; but even by this defect of his, he has been the most admirable harbinger of men who felt within them the spirit, the call, and the passion to plunge more deeply into all the labyrinths of thought, and all the secrets of knowledge. He marks the point of transition from the philosophy of the seventeenth to the new mode of thinking of the eighteenth century—one of the most remarkable eras in the whole history of mankind. As he and his philosophy have never exerted much influence out of Germany, and have been little studied in France, and not at all in England, I have thought fit to pass him over in silence while treating of foreign philosophers, and reserved him for a place by himself. The same conduct has been adopted in respect to his adversary Spinoza, because he too has had a similar fate, has been little heard of either in his own country or in England, and not at all in France, but been zealously defended and attacked by Germans alone. Spinoza's greatest error, that of making no distinction between God and the world, is one of the most pernicious nature. He denied to

individual beings independence and self-direction, and saw in them all only various manifestations of one eternal and all comprehending existence ; he thus took personality from the Deity, and freedom from man, and by representing all that is immoral, untrue, and impious, as appearances, not realities, he went far to destroy all distinctions between good and evil. This error is so intimately connected with the doctrines of unassisted reason, that it is probably the very oldest of all the falsities which sprung up in the room of the truth originally communicated to mankind by his Maker. But Spinosæ threw pantheism into a more scientific shape than it ever possessed before his time. The error itself is one so natural to scientific and self-confident reason, that Descartes, from whose system that of Spinosæ immediately sprung, was prevented only by the want of depth and decision in his spirit, from falling into the abyss upon the brink of which he stood. In this, as in many other cases, we must be careful to separate the error from the person. It frequently happens that he who first opens up a new path of error, who even thoroughly prepares it, and points it out in the most decided and fearless manner, is nevertheless far less dangerous than his followers who pursue the same track without the same confidence. The morality of Spinosæ is not indeed that of the Bible, for he himself was no Christian, but it is still a pure and noble morality, resembling that of the ancient Stoics, perhaps possessing considerable advantages over that system. That which makes him strong when opposed to adversaries who do not understand or feel his depth, or who, unconsciously, have fallen into errors not much different from his, is not merely the scientific clearness and decision of his intellect, but in a much higher degree the open-heartedness, strong feeling, and conviction with which all that he says seems to gush from his heart and soul. We cannot call this a natural inspiration, such as that which animates the poet, the artist, or the naturalist, still less the inspiration of the supernatural world ; for where can this find a place when there is no faith in an effective

Deity? But it is a thorough and penetrating impression and feeling of the eternal which accompanies him in all the ranges of his thought, and lifts him above the world of the senses. The remarkable error which lies at the root of all his philosophy is indeed a pernicious and detestable one, and it might appear as if nothing could be worse. Yet if we compare the error of Spinoza with the atheism of the eighteenth century, we shall be at no loss to discover a mighty difference between them. That material philosophy, if we must give it such a name, which explains every thing by matter, and gives the first place to sense, is an error which seems almost to lie lower than the region of humanity. Rarely, among particular individuals who have embraced such a system, can there be much reason to hope for a return to truth; although there can be no difficulty in conceiving that an age or nation, which has seen its pernicious moral consequences openly displayed, should throw it off with abhorrence. The high spirituality, on the contrary, of that other error into which Spinoza fell, may well appear to leave greater means and more open paths for reformation. But, after all, an error is surely so much the more pernicious, that it is fitted to seize on noble and intellectual disciples; the immediate consequences are then not so practically dangerous, but the evil principle has by this means time to fasten itself more deeply, and sooner or later is sure to manifest the power of its corruption upon the whole either of an age or of a nation; as that disease is the most fatal to the human body which makes its slow but steady attacks upon the very vitals of our frame.

The philosophy of Leibnitz is almost entirely fastened upon that of Spinoza. It is almost throughout a polemic philosophy; and even when it does not assume the external form of controversy, its object is always to pull down the common philosophy of his age, to answer it, resolve its doubts, and supply its deficiencies; it is entirely devoted to the spirit and necessities of his time, and never comes forward in the independence and confidence of its own original

power. The literary sceptic Bayle, and Locke, the founder of the sensation system, were the principal adversaries of Leibnitz, to say nothing of a few more personal opponents. But the most prominent of them all is Spinoza, with whom he frequently, nay, almost perpetually contends, even where he does not name him, as if with an invisible and dreadful enemy. Of the philosophers with whom he agrees, and of the sources from which he derived a great part of his arguments, he says very little. It was no part of his character to recognise the existence of an eternal and spiritual world, whereof the sensible world is only the external vehicle and veil. His hypothesis, on the contrary, (according to which sensible objects are merely a perplexed chaos of solitary spiritual principles or monads in a state of slumber or imperfection,) coincides with, or at least stands at no very remote distance from, the atomical doctrine of Epicurus and the modern atheists, and is at the best only a sort of intermediate system between that and the proper belief in a spiritual world. His attempt to solve the difficulties of the contemporary philosophy concerning the connexion of the mind and the body, by saying that the common Creator of both made them originally to go together, as a watchmaker might make two watches, is only a piece of ingenious sophistry, and tends to give a degrading view of the nobler part of our nature. His celebrated *Theodicee*, or justification of God on account of the existence of moral evil, answers that question which so perpetually recurs to the natural reason, with the bold dexterity of a practised diplomatist, who conceives it to be his duty to promote by every means, good, bad, or indifferent, the cause of his master, and to conceal as much as possible from the eyes of his opponent any thing that seems favourable to the other side of the question. It is impossible for the philosophy of reason to answer the question concerning the existence of evil in the world, without either denying the existence of evil, in contradiction to our daily experience, or ascribing its creation to the Deity, in contradiction to our own feeling and the voice of conscience.

The solution of Leibnitz (that of optimism) which gave so much room for the wit of Voltaire, has more lately found a counterpart in the theory of a celebrated philosopher, who explains every thing upon a principle of which Leibnitz had no idea, who thinks that the only end for which the external world was created, was to afford the spirit room to exercise and develop itself, and maintains that the worse the world is, the better is it adapted to serve this purpose. Neither this Spartan, nor that elaborate solution, is satisfactory either to feeling or to philosophy.

In the Leibnitzian ideas concerning space and time, we have a remarkable evidence how entirely the views of the truest and highest philosophy were at that period forgotten. The philosophy of antiquity recognised in time and place an endless theatre for the display of the eternal, and of the living pulsation of eternal love. By the contemplation of such things, however imperfect and inadequate, the natural, even the merely sensible man, was affected with a stupendous feeling of admiration well calculated to prepare the way for religious thoughts. It extended and ennobled his soul to regard, in such a manner as this, the past, the present, and the future. But Leibnitz saw in time and space nothing but the arrangement of contemporary or consecutive incidents. So apt are deadening and insignificant ideas to creep into the place of living and just feeling, in all that is most fitted to elevate man above the world of the senses. The philosophy of Leibnitz was brought into fashion in Germany, and established in the schools, chiefly by means of Wolf; this circumstance is sufficient to characterise it. A sect which lays hold of active life, is judged by the direction which it pursues, and the consequences which it produces. But the spirit of a sect confined to schools soon becomes a mere being of formality: Aristotle, Descartes, Leibnitz, or Kant is called the master, and the ideas are said to be his, but in truth they are no longer ideas as they were in him; they are mere formulas. Germany, nevertheless, has to thank this scholastic system for preventing, or

at least checking, the introduction of the yet more dangerous sectarian spirit of the atheistical philosophy of the senses ; and after all the pedantry was not of long duration. Leibnitz himself, although he wrote mostly in Latin and French, gave quite a new spring to the study of the German language, history, and antiquities ; and even Wolf's German writings were of considerable service to the language. They were followed by some who, although belonging to their school, had both originality of thought and power of writing ; and these, along with a few better poets than had lately appeared, first brought our language out of the state of barbarism into which it had fallen. They prepared the way for Klopstock, who arose in the middle of the last century, and became the founder of a new epoch, the master and father of the present literature of Germany.

But before I proceed to depict Klopstock, I must direct your eyes to a short review of the period which intervened between the old and the new literature of our country. The sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries produced indeed few great German writers, but these few are, on account of the rarity, the more worthy of our attention. I have already explained in what way the chivalrous poetry and art of the middle age were lost during the controversies of the sixteenth, and how our language itself became corrupted during the long continued civil wars by which the internal peace of our country was so cruelly agitated and convulsed. There was one instrument by which the influx of barbarism was opposed, and one treasure which made up for what had been lost—I mean the German translation of the Bible. It is well known to you that all true philologists regard this as the standard and model of classical expression in the High Dutch language ; and that not only Klopstock, but many other writers of the first rank, have fashioned their style, and selected their phrases according to the rules of this version. It is worthy of your notice, that in no other modern language have so many Biblical words and phrases come into the use of common life, as in ours. I perfectly agree



with these writers who consider this circumstance as a fortunate one; and I believe, that from it has been derived not a little of that power, life, and simplicity, by which I think the best German writers are distinguished from all other moderns. The Catholic as well as the modern Protestant scholar have many things to find fault with in this translation; but these, after all, regard only individual passages wherein Luther erred, either by writing in the spirit of his own sect, and contrary to the old doctrines of the Christian church, or from a want of knowledge in history, physics, or geography. In these later times we have witnessed an attempt to render a new and *rational* translation of the Bible an instrument of propagating the doctrines of the illuminati; and we have seen this too much in the hands even of Catholics themselves. But the instant this folly had blown over, we returned with increased affection to the excellent old version of Luther. Luther himself has not indeed the whole merit of producing it. He only selected the best parts of translations existing before his time, and he was assisted in this labour by several of his friends, in particular by the indefatigable Melancthon. We owe to him, nevertheless, the highest gratitude for placing in our hands this most noble and manly model of German expression. Even in his own writings he displays a most original eloquence, surpassed by few names that occur in the whole history of literature. He had, indeed, all those properties which render a man fit to be a revolutionary orator. This revolutionary eloquence is manifest, not only in his half-political and business writings, such as the *Address to the Nobility of the German Nation*, but in all the works which he has left behind him. In almost the whole of them we perceive the marks of mighty internal conflict. Two worlds appear to be contending for the mastery over the mighty soul of this man so favoured by God and nature. Throughout all his writings there prevails a struggle between light and darkness, faith and passion, God and himself. The choice which he made—the use to which he devoted his ma-

jestic genius—these are subjects upon which it is even now quite impossible for me to speak so as to please you all. For myself I am free to acknowledge, that I can never regard either his writings or his life, except with some portion of that compassion which is due to a great nature led astray by over-confidence in its own vigour. As to the intellectual power and greatness of Luther, abstracted from all consideration of the uses to which he applied them, I think there are few even of his own disciples who appreciate him highly enough. His coadjutors were mostly mere scholars, indolent and enlightened men of the common order. It was upon him and his soul that the fate of Europe depended. He was the man of his age and his nation.

Luther was thoroughly a popular writer. No country in Europe can boast of so many remarkable, comprehensive, powerful, and extraordinary writers for the common people, as Germany. However much the higher orders of Germany were inferior, or however lately they came up to those of France, England, and Italy, it is certain that the common people of none of these countries has displayed so much profoundness of intellect, and natural power of mind, as that of our own nation. It is an old saying, that the power of kings is given by God ; it is an equally old one, and one quite as much worthy of being kept in mind, that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Both are clear, perfect, and true ; wo to those that disregard, or would mislead this oracle of the Deity ! They are much to be pitied who conceive that they are capable, by the tricks of empty and vain politics, of leading the people entirely according to their own selfish and unworthy purposes and desires. The people is wiser than they imagine, and far wiser than themselves. The people sees through their tricks, and will not easily be deceived. But of all men they surely are guilty of the greatest crime who would make use of the natural power of our people for the purposes of destruction and convulsion. This strength must indeed be appalling, should it ever be directed by any other guides than those it has as yet

obeyed,—obedience to the precepts, and faith in the doctrines of religion. Narrow must their judgment be who conceive that this power is extinct, because it is seldom visible. It is the inheritance of our ancestors, and can never be thrown away ; but like many of the other hidden powers of nature, it is too great to be often manifested.

The popular writing of northern Germany was by no means confined to religious subjects, (as in Luther's works,) but embraced also poetry and philosophy. I shall for the present mention only two of the most remarkable authors, the celebrated *Meistersanger* of Nurnberg, and that Christian visionary who was so much celebrated throughout Europe, about the time of the thirty years' war, under the name of the *Teutonic philosopher*.

In popular songs and poems the possessions of Germany are abundant. The popular poetry is generally of two kinds : it consists in part of songs, solitary fragments of a departed age of heroism and chivalry, whose recollections have been disturbed and broken by the revolutions of external events, or have become exploded in consequence of the gradual change in the modes of our social life and ideas ; in part of the productions of the vulgar themselves,—and this is the most striking division of the popular poetry of Germany. The master of Nurnberg was an artificer in poetry as well as in common life. He is, however, a writer full of power and fancy ; he possesses abundance of wit and shrewdness, and if we are to compare him with the early writers of other languages, he is I think more inventive than Chaucer, more rich than Marot, and more poetical than either. In regard to our language, his works form a treasure, of which no proper use has yet been made.

The same remark may be applied to Jacob Bohme, that Teutonic philosopher who is so much ridiculed by the general race of literary men. These are themselves sensible that they understand neither the good nor the bad that is in his writings ; but they are ignorant that they know absolutely nothing either respecting the man himself or the

relation in which he stood to his contemporaries. I have, on a former occasion, shown you what my opinion is respecting the effects of philosophy being cultivated by the common people, and neglected by the higher orders of a nation. Such, however, was actually the case at that period, both in Protestant Germany and in England. Jacob Bohme is commonly called a dreamer, and it is very true that in his writings there may be more marks of an ardent imagination than of a sound judgment. But we cannot at least deny this strange man the praise of a very poetical fancy. If we should consider him merely as a poet, and compare him with those other Christian poets who have handled subjects connected with the supernatural world—with Klopstock, with Milton, or even with Dante, we shall find that he rivals the best of them in fulness of fancy and depth of feeling; and that he falls little below them, even in regard to individual beauties and poetical expression. Whatever defects may be found in the philosophy of Jacob Bohme, the historian of German literature can never pass over his name in silence. In few works of any period have the strength and richness of our language been better displayed than in his. His language possesses indeed a charm of nature, simplicity, and unsought vigour, which we should look for in vain in the tongue which we now speak, enriched as it is by the immense importation of foreign terms, and the invented phraseologies of our late philosophers.

The permanent effects produced by the thirty years' war upon our literature were extremely hurtful; but there is no doubt that, while it actually raged, it operated as an awakener and animator of German intellect. The Silesian Opitz arose in the midst of it, and gave to our language and poetry a direction which has since found many imitators. His immediate models were sought from Holland—a country which at that time possessed a Hugo Grotius—which was not only the most learned and enlightened of all Protestant states, but also rich and cultivated in its poetry, and abounding in vernacular tragedies composed after the

antique model, a considerable time before the great French tragedians were fostered in the court of Lewis XIV. Yet the excellence of Opitz is quite independent of what he borrowed from any foreign literature, from the Dutch tragedies, and the pastoral romances of the Spaniards. Even his dramatic attempts, free translations, or imitations of the Greek and Italian theatres, have not produced any effect. The truth is, that in the very best and most original of his lyrical, miscellaneous, and didactic poems, we should always regard more what he was fitted by nature to be, what he desired, and felt, and aspired to, than what he really was. He is commonly called the father of German poetry. It appears to me that, at least since Klopstock, few of the sons have been grateful enough to cultivate much acquaintance with this parent. If any man was ever formed by nature to be a heroic poet, this was Opitz. He felt this, and wished to be the heroic poet of the German nation. But his life was spent amidst the perplexities and agitations of a tumultuous period, and he died in early manhood before he had time to complete either his purposes or his poetry. Throughout all his works, imperfect as they are, there break forth flashes and emanations of that course of thought and greatness of soul which create a heroic poet; and even in regard to language, those noble sentiments and strong thoughts of Opitz are in general expressed with an artless simplicity and naïveté, which, I think, have not since been equalled. His style is superior to that of Klopstock.

Next to Opitz, the most distinguished of the Silesian poets of this period is Flemming. His poetry is intensely personal; it is filled with the inspiration of his own friendships, passions, and loves. His life was worthy of his being so celebrated; he travelled through the then unknown interior of Russia into Persia, and has described all that he saw or experienced during this interesting journey, with the most glowing feeling, and a truly oriental splendour of fancy. In style, however, he is quite inferior to Opitz. It is much to be regretted, that both of these men were, after

all, or were at least held to be, not national, but provincial poets—not Germans, but Silesians. After the unfortunate civil war, whose flames, fed by the participation or policy of the half of Europe, wasted and devoured our country for thirty years—after the still more miserable peace of 1648, the strength of the German nation was broken, and German poetry shared in the general decline. Its substance and life were fled, and it soon degenerated into a mere artificial and fantastic display of insignificant thoughts upon worthless subjects. The first introducer of the false taste was Hoffmanswaldau, but it was rendered general by the more powerful talents of Lohenstein. This period, from 1648 to the middle of last century, was our proper age of barbarism, a sort of division and chaotic interregnum in the history of German literature. Our language hesitated between a species of would-be French and wavering German, and was, with all this weakness, full of affectation and artifice. Even in a political point of view, the most degraded and unfortunate period of our history is that immediately subsequent to the peace of Westphalia. With the beginning of the eighteenth century, the power of Germany began again to revive. Austria again attained the summit of strength and glory ; some of the first thrones in Europe were ascended by princes of the German houses, and one of them founded in Germany itself a new and splendid monarchy. All these circumstances, particularly when taken together, could scarcely fail to produce a reviving and quickening effect on the intellect, language, and manners of our country. Many princes were compelled, even by considerations of mere political interest, to become the patrons of science. These causes did operate, but not speedily ; they were opposed by many serious obstacles ; above all, by the deep-rooted corruption which had extended itself through all the German notions of art and style. The first in thought and language of the better lyrical poets of the eighteenth century, resembled in a great measure their predecessors of the seventeenth, and devoted themselves entirely to the occasional poetry of

gallantry, court, festival, and panegyric. Those of them who paid the greatest attention to style, Hagedorn, and after him Utz, were more addicted to imitation, and certainly very happy imitation, of French and English poets, than to the open expression of their own feelings and passions. Those who, by a higher tone of inspiration, like Haller, or by a more graceful and elegant fertility, like Gleim, are most deserving of the name of poets, are, in respect of language, always careless, frequently corrupt. At the same time, they must be regarded, even in respect to language and its construction alone, as great and meritorious, when compared with the state of barbarism into which the taste and judgment of the time immediately preceding them had fallen. They must receive still greater admiration, when we reflect on the unfavourable circumstances of some of their lives. Several of these first revisers of the German language and poetry died in very early life; such was the fate of Kleist, who was perhaps the greatest genius of them all, of Kronenk, and of Elias Schlegel; others devoted their chief attention to the bustle of active life, or passed into foreign countries and forgot their destiny. They all felt the want of a point of union, and looked for it in vain from the youthful hands of Frederick the Second. It is common of late to justify the conduct of this monarch, by asserting that at the time when he arose, the language and poetry of his country were really in such a state that they could not possibly be viewed with any thing but contempt and aversion by one of so much talent as he possessed. There is, however, no foundation in fact for such a plea: what might not have been done for German literature by a prince, in whose time (and some of them too in whose own dominions) there arose and flourished such men as Klopstock, Winkelmann, Kant, and Lessing? Where, in any age, could better materials have been found, and what were the foreign favourites of Frederick (Voltaire alone excepted) when placed by the side of these great resuscitators of science and art? What was a Maupertuis, or a La Metrie?—the



mere mob of French literati. We may well excuse Klopstock for expressing, with somewhat of the keenness of personal resentment, his indignation for the unmerited contempt poured upon the language and literature of his country. He felt and expressed this with bitter severity, when he instituted a comparison between Frederick and Cæsar. In the time of Julius, more Greek, good, bad, or indifferent, was written at Rome, than French in Germany during the whole of the eighteenth century. The Roman language possessed at that period as few classical works as the German did before 1750. And yet Cæsar thought it well worth his while to devote the most careful attention to his mother-tongue, nay, to be himself a Roman philologer and grammarian. And it was thus that he made himself one of the first of orators and of writers, distinctions which no man ever can reach who makes use of a foreign dialect. But upon the whole, we should perhaps scarcely regret the want of such an union of German writers as Frederick had it in his power to effect. Individuals would indeed have written better and more easily, but it may be that the literature as a whole might have suffered, that it might have been narrowed in its spirit and comprehension, and become the affair of a province rather than of the whole German people. We should have paid dearly for a somewhat more rapid development, by sacrificing what constitute at this moment the chief excellence of our writers—riches and freedom. But the whole of the argument in defence of Frederick proceeds upon a wrong view of the subject. If kings are to defer their patronage of national literature till such time as there are in the country abundance of elegant and perfect writers, the utmost which it can be in their power to effect, must be the establishment of some tame and unprofitable academy. The monarch who is ambitious to befriend and guide the intellect of his people, must foster and cherish talents not yet completely developed, and furnish young men with the instruments and opportunities of distinction. We may pardon the zeal of Klopstock, for he had in his own person

abundant experience of the neglect of princes. He was conscious to himself of a genius capable of diffusing new spirit and life, not over poetry alone, but over all the departments of literature. The evil influence of Voltaire over France was not more extensive than the good influence of Klopstock might have been over Germany, had he been supplied with room, occasion, means, and instruments worthy of his genius.

Klopstock stood conspicuous, and almost alone in the German literature of his time, in respect of his intensely national feelings, feelings with which few of his contemporaries sympathised, and which still fewer could understand. It was his ambition to transfer these German feelings into poetry. With the *Messiad*, the new literature of our country may be said to begin; so immeasurable have been the benefits derived from it, particularly in respect to style and expression, although the poem is now admired chiefly *upon trust*, or has not at least become a work of true power and living feeling in our hands. The plan labours under the same disadvantages which I have described as inseparable from all poems of this species. Klopstock's most successful poetry is that conceived in the spirit of elegy. Every gradation, blending, and depth of elegiac feeling, is handled by him with the power and ease of a master; however far he pursues the stream of his melancholy reflections, he never doubts, nor needs to doubt, that his readers will willingly follow him, and deliver up their spirits to his control. He calls forth the most melting of our sympathies even for a fallen spirit—*Abbadona*. There is another element which enters as largely, but far less happily, into the composition of his poetry. In prose, he is a writer who errs by being too sententious, brief, and epigrammatic; but in poetry, he indulges in a verbose and elaborate species of rhetoric, which often destroys, in a great measure, the effect of his feeling. Both Milton and Virgil are chargeable with the same defect, but Klopstock has carried it much further than either of them. We may allow him to assume that his heavenly per-

sonages make use of human, nay, of German language, but we can with difficulty suppose that beings of so elevated a nature can waste their time in such frivolous and long-winded conversations as occur in the *Messiad*.

That neither the nation nor the poet himself was satisfied with the *Messiad* as a whole, is sufficiently proved by the very great dissimilarity of the first and second halves of the poem.

There lay in the spirit of Klopstock a lofty idea of a new and eminently German poetry. His mighty hand put an end to the greatest reproach of our literature: he demonstrated that Christianity on the one hand, and Gothic mythology and antiquity on the other, must be the main elements of all new European poetry and inspiration. In his time, the scholars of Denmark were zealously employed in bringing into notice the northern mythology and the *Edda*; and Klopstock himself was willing to take a part in their labours. But the small lyrical poems and odes by which he attempted to promote their views were not the proper means for accomplishing it. The Danish poets were wiser in adopting the department of narrative and descriptive poetry.

To the *Hermann* of Klopstock, next to the *Messiad*, his most considerable poem, the same general remarks may be applied which I have already made concerning the elegiac spirit of all his poetry, and the abuse of rhetorical acuteness. As a drama, it is calculated for a future and ideal theatre, not for that actual theatre either of his time or of ours, which seems to regard with a favourable eye all manner of pleasure and purpose rather than the poetical. Klopstock seized and felt only the two extreme points of German poetry; he overlooked all that lies in the middle between the Christian and the northern, and all that is produced by the blending of these two elements—the whole middle age, the thousand or twelve hundred years which intervened between Attila and that peace of Westphalia, of which, so much against our wishes, we are compelled to make an epoch both in literature and in history. He omitted, there-

fore, to survey the region of all others most fruitful and most obvious, the only one upon which poetry ever can be established so as to become a matter of historical and national influence in our eyes. This great blank which Klopstock left, many subsequent writers have attempted to fill up; particularly Bodmer as a scholar, and Wieland as a poet. Bodmer was passionately fond of the old romantic chivalrous poetry, and was the first who brought the riches of Germany in that department into light; although he adopted a method which was ill calculated to hasten the effects he wished to produce. The poetry of Wieland was entirely devoted to the romantic, which had been left untouched by Klopstock. It is true, that a historical romantic poem, after the manner of Tasso, not perhaps founded on the Crusades, but on some other of the rich poetical materials of the middle age, might have been a better and more effectual instrument, than an entirely fanciful and playful subject, such as that of Oberon. But notwithstanding all this, and in spite of many absurd modern things which he has interwoven, the services of Wieland have been eminently useful in recovering romantic feelings. It is a shame and a pity that one who had recreated in so glorious a manner the minstrelsy of the Provencial period, should have so soon laid poetry aside. This is the greatest reproach which can be made to the poet of Oberon, that he who, had he acted wisely, might have become the German Ariosto, or the rival of the Italian one, should have stooped to be the imitator of such a prose writer as Crebillon. In prose, it is quite evident that his style and expressions are vastly inferior to what they appear in his verses. I believe that when all his Greek romances are forgotten, the fame of Wieland will still be supported by his Oberon.

Of the other poets of the first generation, the most original is Gessner. But he deals in a species of poetry too remote from actual life, and too devoid of any precise species of mythology. He wanders, therefore, in a world of shades, and every thing assumes in his hands the appearance of a

tame uniformity. A contempt of rhyme and metre may harmonise well enough with such a sort of poetry, but it also promotes and cherishes its most characteristic errors and defects.

In one respect alone, the doctrine and example of Klopstock operated unfavourably upon the German language. In order to recall a language out of a situation of entire corruption, few better means can be selected than the introduction of severe, elaborate, and foreign forms of writing. These, at first indeed, produce the appearance of restraint and difficulty, but they destroy the prevalent absurdities of carelessness. The ancient hexameter measure accords well with our language, and ours is the only modern language in which it is tolerable. But with whatever excellent effects the introduction of foreign forms may be attended, they should still be regarded merely as exercises. He who would create a truly national poem must choose a national and familiar measure. The accents of a foreign metre do not come upon the ear with the effect of domestic influence, or fasten themselves in the memory and heart of the readers. The hexameter, when carelessly executed, displeases scholars, and when written with accuracy, appears monotonous and wearisome to ordinary readers. The *Messiad* is prevented by its import from becoming an universal favourite. But for this, I should consider the measure in which it is written as the great cause of its unpopularity.

It was a great error in an illustrious poet, such as Klopstock, to hate and banish rhyme. It is well that he has not succeeded in all that he wished to effect. It was a most absurd thing to suppose that rhyme, a custom which has been familiarised to German ears by nine hundred or a thousand years, and which has become entwisted among the very roots of our language, could be thrown off with so much ease. Besides, rhyme is not merely an adventitious habit, it is founded on the very nature of Teutonic speech. Klopstock conceived that the most ancient German songs and poems were rhythmical, but without rhyme: but he was

mistaken. It is true that they are without that regular rhyme at the end of lines which we now use, but they all possess that species of repetition of sound, which is alike observable in the Islandic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, old English, and old Saxon poets, which goes by the name of *alliteration*, and of which, even in the latest poetry of Germany and England, the traces are abundantly manifest. The transition from this kind of rhyme to ours was a very easy one. Rhyme is not indeed so necessary in our language as in the unmusical one of France, but it is intermingled with the very foundation of our speech, and has entered long since into our pronunciation. Wieland deserves much praise for restoring rhyme, and putting an end to that mania for blank endings and unsatisfactory metres, which was introduced by Klopstock, which was tolerated in him, but utterly disgusting in the hands of his imitators.

Wieland's love of philological pursuits led him sometimes into bigoted paradox, and the same thing may be said of a much greater philologer than he was—Adelung. I am far from wishing to deny the merits and talents of this great etymologist; but in our time it is no longer easy to overlook such monstrous absurdities as some of those into which he fell; that, for instance, of confining the pure High Dutch language entirely to the limits of the old Margravate of Meissen, and of despising Klopstock, who was the first writer among his own contemporaries, nay, the first master of the German language which had then appeared.

How relative the idea of a golden period must always be, at least in respect to our literature, we have now had many examples; Gottsched fixed it in the age of Frederick the first king of Prussia, and talked of Besser, Neukirch, and Pietch, as if they were to be in German literature what Virgil is in the Roman, and Corneille and Racine in the French. These writers are now, however, regarded without any of the enthusiastic admiration of Gottsched. So convinced was he that human intellect and German poetry had at that time reached their summit, that he persuaded

himself he could see all around him the marks of a decline, and he wrote in such terms as these in the year 1751, the very year in which the first part of the *Messiad* was published. The poets whom he praised so highly produced only odes and small pieces; but a literature can never reach its perfection till it can boast of a great epic poem and a great history. We must be grateful to those earlier writers for the care with which they purified our language, but they were only preparing the way for the more stately march of those who came after them. The rapid and yet gradual improvement which occurred in our last century is indeed a subject which cannot be considered by us with too much satisfaction. There is no privileged period in which the great change took place. The earliest works of Lessing can scarcely be said to be written in the same language of which he lived to make use. From 1750 till 1800, a constant succession of works appeared in Germany, of which, although few are perfect, there are none that have not added both strength and elegance to the language in which they are composed.

Although the whole of this period has been distinguished by unintermitted fertility, there is no difficulty in classing our writers into their different generations. Each of these generations has its own characteristic excellencies and defects, derived in general from the situation or circumstances of the time, rather than from the genius of the individuals.

In the first generation I class those writers whose development and first exertions occurred between the years 1750 and 1760. My limits do not permit me to enumerate the whole even of those who are entitled to great respect. I have already touched on the most celebrated. But I cannot pass over in silence the learned Jesuit Denis, who should be remembered with peculiar honour by my audience, because it was he who first introduced into the literature of Austria that pure taste which had been created in the north by Klopstock.

Of prose writers, many of those philosophers whom I



shall mention hereafter belong to the first generation ; even Kant himself, if we consider the period of his birth, and the nature of his earliest writings. The most distinguished were Lessing and Winkelmann.

The writers of this period exhibit many traces of the unfortunate state into which German literature had fallen in the age immediately preceding their own. With what difficulties Winkelmann had to contend before he succeeded in forming his rich and exquisite style, we may learn from the perusal of his youthful letters. Kant's mode of writing bears innumerable marks of long, hard, and severe labour. The juvenile works, in particular the poems, of Lessing should be considered merely as a tribute paid by a man of genius to the spirit of his age. Even Klopstock, however much he is to be admired, would, without doubt, have been far better had he been preceded by writers of great eminence.

Such were the injurious consequences produced on the writers of the first generation, by the miserable state of German literature at the period when they made their appearance. We must not forget, however, that the difficulties with which they had to contend stimulated them to exertions of power and greatness to which they might not otherwise have aspired. They were obliged to concentrate all their powers upon one point ; this was the case with Klopstock, Winkelmann, and, in another way, with Kant. More lately, our literature, and above all our poetry, has lost that tone of severe simplicity and dignity which distinguished the best authors of the first generation. The admirable works of Winkelmann may perhaps have been very instrumental in producing this effect. The beautiful and tasteful have become too exclusively the object and passion of our writers. We must return to the still more exalted inspiration of national feeling and religion.

## LECTURE XVI.

GENERAL REVIEW — SECOND GENERATION — GERMAN CRITICISM — LESSING AND HERDER — LESSING AS A PHILOSOPHER — FREE-THINKING AND THE ILLUMINATI — THE EMPEROR JOSEPH THE SECOND — CHARACTER OF THE THIRD GENERATION — THE PHILOSOPHY OF KANT — GÖETHE AND SCHILLER — ANTICIPATION — FICHTE AND TIECK — TRUE CHARACTER OF GERMAN LITERATURE — CONCLUSION.

THOSE who are best able to form an opinion concerning the modern literature of Germany, are sensible that its principal defect is its want of harmony. To point out in a general way where this harmony should be sought, and wherein alone it may be found, might seem perhaps to be no very difficult task. But I know not that it could be productive of much good to point out the remote termination, unless we could accompany this with some directions as to the way which must lead to it, some warnings concerning the by-paths which deflect from it, the obstacles which interrupt, and the dangers which surround it. Before we think of solving the problem, we must first thoroughly comprehend it in all its extent and all its difficulty; we must discover the extremities of the several cords, and follow them through all the mazes of their intertexture, ere we need hope to loosen the Gordian knot of our literature.

The nearer we come to our own time, the more am I obliged to contract the extent of my researches, and to dwell less upon the characters of individuals, and confine myself to the universal progress and ruling spirit of intellect and letters. The time is not yet come for a complete history of German literature. Many things will not appear in their just light, till the nature of their consequences has been more fully developed. It is impossible to raise the structure till the materials be at our disposal.

I have already attempted to depict, in a general manner,

the most illustrious poets of the first generation. In order that I may adhere as closely as may be to the order of chronology, I shall defer for a little my view of the philosophers, and other prose writers, their contemporaries, because neither of the most celebrated of them, Lessing and Kant, began to exert an effectual influence upon the general mind till somewhat later.

After the long feuds between Austria and Prussia had at last terminated in a durable peace, Germany enjoyed a number of years of repose alike salutary to her states, her sciences, and her intellect. At one time, indeed, it seemed as if this quiet was about to be broken; but the danger was a transitory one, and Germany continued to flourish in the enjoyment of peace and her own power, without being conscious at the time, to what causes she was indebted for the happiness of her condition.

The first establishers of our literature, and purifiers of our language and poetry, who either immediately preceded or immediately followed Klopstock, and devoted their lives to the same purposes which he always kept in view, were placed in a situation of no ordinary difficulty. Many of the obstacles which were opposed to them they overcame; their honourable toils prepared and smoothed the path; even the errors and defects which may be remarked in them have warned and guided their successors, and are deserving of the respect of posterity.

It need not surprise us to find, that the second generation of German poets and writers, whose genius was first developed about the year 1770, have an appearance of boldness and facility to which their predecessors were strangers. They used and inherited what the labours of the first generation had founded and created. The most distinguished poets of this epoch, are Göethe, Stolberg, Voss, Bürger; to these I might add the names of a few other individuals who were nearly or exactly their contemporaries, and who, by their genius, are well entitled to stand beside them, although, either from the character of their works, or from the inci-

dents of their own lives, they have not been able to obtain an equally splendid portion of celebrity. It is very true, that along with these there arose, at that period, a band of popular writers, very inferior to them, whose writings have almost brought the time of their production into some contempt. But that this epoch was in itself one of the most brilliant and fruitful in the whole course of our literary history, it is not possible to doubt. We need only remember, that in addition to those I have named, Jacobi, Lavater, Herder, and John Müller, both by the date and character of their works, belong to this epoch ; men whose fame is not confined to Germany, but has, in part at least, been echoed by every country in Europe. The writers of the second generation are, both in spirit and in style, entirely different from those who went before them. Their method of writing is full of soul, fire, and life ; abundant in animation and wit, original, new, and in many respects, exquisite. They want, however, uniformity, regularity, and a standard ; and are often chargeable with a neglect of the necessary purity of language. This is true even of Herder and John Müller, the most erudite, as well as the most comprehensive, spirits of their day. It might almost seem as if the adherents of the first generation were right in asserting, that purity of language is, if not exclusively, at least principally, the portion of those whom they admire. But this must not be taken in its fullest extent ; in some writers, and particularly, some poets of the second epoch, in Voss, in Stolberg, and in many of the works of Göethe, the purity of language is found in all its strictness and perfection ; more so than perhaps in any writers or poets of the first generation. The carefulness of Voss, in respect to language, is such as to render his style, on some occasions, painful and hard ; and if it be true, that in many of the minor works, both early and late, of Göethe, there occur many carelessnesses, yet in his noblest poems the language is as beautiful as German can be, and possesses, indeed, an artless elegance and grace to which Klopstock never could attain.

The language was not only enriched by the genius of these writers and poets who followed out with greater freedom of step the path opened by their predecessors, but individual works were produced more perfect in their kind than Germany had even yet possessed. Poetry at that time took a totally new direction. Somewhat earlier it had been separated into two parties, the imitators of Wieland, and those of Klopstock. The first set thought of nothing but muses, graces, love, roses, zephyrs, nymphs, and hamadryads; the second re-echoed the old minstrelsy of the bards, the ice-dance, or the bear-hunt among rocks and wildernesses; they wandered among the clouds with Eloah, and trod heavenly paths strewed with suns and stars; or if they stooped to earth, it was in thunder, storm, and whirlwind, like the trumpet of the judgment. Between these two extremes of monotonous and uninteresting elevation, and luscious half-Greek, half-modern, effeminacy, the new poets endeavoured to establish something possessed of greater power, and more akin to nature. They made Homer, as the great poet of living nature, the chief subject of these eulogies, and translated him with much success into the German language. Or they revived the faded recollections of ancient German history, art, and poetry, although they were, in some instances, little qualified, in point of erudition, to do what they had undertaken. Their attempts were in general mere echoes; but some were both admirable in themselves, and have been productive of important results. The single work, "Gotz of Berlichingen with the iron hand," was the parent of a numerous progeny of steel-clad knights and brotherhoods, who preserve alive, even down to our own time, the memory of old German freedom and heroism, at least upon the stage. The poem itself is a juvenile one, and has many errors and imperfections, and the history and manners represented in it are very far from being the true ones; but it must always retain its value as a poetical picture of great energy, and be honoured as the best of all the youthful poems of its author.

Upon the whole, perhaps, this new turn of things carried poetry somewhat too far from that lofty idea which Klopstock conceived of it ; it was separated too much into individual points, and brought too soon, and too exclusively, to the service of the stage. It seems to me, at least, quite certain, that a national theatre is never the better of being an early one. The Greek theatre itself owes much of its excellence to the period of its development. A theatre cannot possibly assume an air of exquisite perfection, unless it has been preceded by a literature and poetry cultivated with high success. Above all, the more lofty and serious species of poetry are its best harbingers, because these imply a national intellect and spirit in a state of development most fitted to receive it. The criticism of Lessing had the effect of drawing our attention too much to the stage. With all his acuteness and erudition, of which none can be a greater admirer than myself, it may, I think, be doubted whether Lessing produced a favourable effect on the German theatre. The translations of Corneille and Voltaire soon gave place to that species of moral domestic pictures introduced into France by Diderot, and prose was even supposed, for a considerable time, to be necessary for a truly natural dialogue. This pernicious error, however, at last passed away. The enthusiasm for Shakespeare, to which Lessing greatly contributed, was more permanent ; and from him we derived notions both of nature and of poetry, far more profound and exquisite than were ever entertained by any of the school of Diderot.

As a critical writer, Lessing was better adapted for discovering and destroying particular errors in taste than for assigning to any one work, author, or species of writing, a true and just place in the scale of literary merit. He had not leisure nor patience to study the perfections of any one great work, as Winkelmann did ; and without such mature consideration and quiet enthusiasm, no man can become an universal critic. We must learn to comprehend the essence of art from admiration of excellence, rather than from de-

tection of error. Lessing is too much a philosopher, and too little an artist in his criticism. He wants that energy of fancy by which Herder was enabled to transport himself into the spirit and poetry of every age and people. It is this very perception and feeling of the poetical, in the character of natural legends, which forms the most distinguishing feature in the genius of Herder. The poetry of the Hebrews was that which most delighted him. He may be called the mythologist of German literature, on account of this gift, this universal feeling of the spirit of antiquity. His power of entering into all the shapes and manifestations of fancy, implies in himself a very high degree of imagination. His mind seems to have been cast in so universal a mould, that he might have attained to equal eminence either as a poet, or as a philosopher.

Since Winkelmann wrote, the taste and feeling for art has been perpetually on the increase among the Germans. This has been promoted, not only by the natural love which we have for poetry, but by the removal of almost all German talents from the affairs of external life. The German intellect has been left only two fields in which to exert itself,—taste and philosophy. The first of these was at first cultivated to a degree which injured the second; for many German writers, who spent their lives in discoursing of subjects of mere art and taste, were evidently formed by nature for the higher species of philosophy. Such a natural predilection is apparent enough, even in Winkelmann; the whole of his high ideas of art are established upon the ground of a Platonic inspiration, which he had cultivated in the best manner, and which was the ruling principle of all his thoughts. Of all kinds of philosophy, there is none which harmonises so well with a love of art as this; but in him the Platonism was so strong, that it lifted him not unfrequently very far above the subjects of which he treated. In particular, his later writings are full of manifestations of this philosophical propensity, and I know not but it might



have been very fortunate for German philosophy, had it set out in the hands of such a Platonist as Winkelmann.

Lessing, so soon as his spirit had reached the height of its manly maturity, laid aside, as follies of his youth, the whole of his antiquarian, dramatic, and critical pursuits. The philosophical inquiry after truth was the object of all his later exertions, and he devoted himself to this noble pursuit with an earnestness of enthusiasm to which even his ardent mind had as yet been a stranger. In his earlier pursuits, he seems to have written rather by way of exercising his genius, and from the wish of overthrowing his adversaries, than from any profound love of his own cause. However much nature had fitted him to be a critic, his highest destination was for philosophy. He was too far above his age to be understood by it; and, moreover, he did not live to fill up the outline of the system which he embraced.

Of the philosophers of the elder school, Sultzer devoted his thoughts and researches to art, with the views and habits of his time; Mendelsohn's ambition was to establish the universal truths of religion upon philosophical principles; Garve was no adherent of the school of Leibnitz, but his whole character shows that he should be classed with the elder period. He devoted himself principally to the moral philosophy of the ancients and the English. He seems to have partaken in the errors of his masters, and to have viewed ethics as founded rather on the principles of elegance and the agreeable, than on those true and more profound principles with which German feelings have greater sympathy. The philosophical romances of Wieland had a still more dangerous tendency to promote a merely Epicurean system of morality. These men were not well fitted to be the guides of a nation and age placed on the brink of such conflicts and difficulties as were then about to agitate the world.

Kant was not as yet known. Lavater pursued a path of his own quite remote from all the rest. The world has

become well acquainted with the follies of his physiognomical reveries, and have considered him as a mere dreamer. The profoundness of his philosophical views, and the best of his works, are equally unknown. Of all the inquirers of the last century I know of none, who, next to Lessing, laboured more to pursue the traces of forgotten truth than Lavater.

The writings of Reimarus concerning natural religion contain nothing but what is quite commonplace. Lessing laid hold of the very same subject with very different views, and with very superior genius. The then prevalent doubts, produced by the philosophy of Locke and Descartes, had no interest for him. In all his controversial writings, (and in none more than his *Education of the Human Race* and his *Freemason Dialogues*,) we may discover things more intimately connected with the principal subjects of the higher philosophy, than any contemporary inquirer seems ever to have contemplated. Leibnitz was the only philosopher, near his own time, of whom he thought much, and him he considered as standing at a very great distance from those who at that time conceived themselves to be of the Leibnitzian school. He understood him better than any of them, because he studied Spinoza whom they neglected. The metaphysics of Lessing are, indeed, imperfect, and, in some respects, he seems not only not to have overcome, but even not to have understood that greatest of all his adversaries; but I must confess that I think he saw further than Kant, although not with so systematic an eye, into the deep places of philosophy. Had he lived longer, and husbanded his strength, his influence and fame might have become very superior to what they are. The freedom and boldness of his spirit might have given a better direction to German philosophy than it received from Kant and his adherents. He is sometimes said to have been a Spinosist; but of this reproach he is by no means deserving. One of his most favourite notions was that of the metempsychosis—a doctrine obviously quite irreconcilable with the genius of a

philosophy that denied the personal duration of the soul. Lessing's leaning was rather to the old oriental philosophy, and of this he himself makes no secret. I perfectly agree with those who maintain that enthusiasm cannot be guarded against with too much care and anxiety; for it is clear, that all the masterly learning of Leibnitz, and all the sound judgment of Lessing, could not preserve these great men from mistakes which are very easily discovered and ridiculed by their inferiors.

The enthusiasm and dreams of Lessing did not pass into the spirit of the age, along with the example of his boldness, and the inheritance of his doubts. He has become an instrument in the hands of his most inveterate enemies. In a certain sense he may be said to have completed the work which was begun by Luther. It was he who established Protestantism in the most enlightened part of Germany, or at least who annihilated there the cause of Catholicism. It is lamentable indeed to see with what perversity of ingenious mischief the principles of this deep and philosophical believer were converted into the weapons of *illumination* and infidelity by Basedow, Nicolai, and Weisshaupt. Unbelief and contempt of religion did not, indeed, make the same bold and rapid strides as in France, or as among certain individuals of England, but the undecided and fantastic shape they have assumed have rendered them more dangerous to such a people as the Germans; and it may be that we have not as yet seen the worst of their consequences.

Even the repose of universal peace, and the flourishing condition of Germany, must have been favourable to the rise of a new mode of thinking, quite as much as to the development of the arts and sciences. Although these did not indeed receive any very open patronage, yet the internal satisfaction of a powerful and thriving nation must have had a very considerable effect even in this respect. Germany in the middle of last century, and in the period immediately subsequent, possessed the two most imposing rulers in

Europe. Frederick and Maria Theresa were, in different ways, the pride of their people, and expectations even of a still higher nature were excited by the youth of the Emperor Joseph II. His active reign satisfied the hopes of his subjects; but so far as science and art were concerned, the prophecies of the patriotic Klopstock were not fulfilled. As the sovereign of so many countries out of Germany, this emperor might rather have been expected to found a great scientific institute for the whole of Europe, than for Germany by itself; and in another work I have expressed my conviction of the important nature of those services which, by so doing, he might have rendered to the spirit and mind of the age in which he appeared. He regarded too exclusively the practical side of the sciences. He was so far, however, from having any contempt of them, that he entered with even too much keenness into many of those theories of law, finance, and police which were started during his time. It is fit and natural that a great monarch should be a practical man, even in regard to science; but they who are the best politicians, are aware that physical power and external splendour are not the only component parts of the greatness of a nation.

I now proceed to the third generation in German literature—a period remarkably different from either of the foregoing. By fixing our eyes distinctly and closely upon the general character of these different epochs and generations, we shall adopt the surest means of solving many otherwise dangerous contradictions, of reconciling many apparently opposite opinions, taken up either from total misunderstanding, or from looking at things in a partial, not a general point of view. The whole external circumstances and ruling spirit of that epoch in which the first education and development of a writer occur, determine very frequently the character of his genius, and in all cases exert a very decisive influence over his choice of the subject to which he applies it.

I account those to belong to the third generation who

mostly formed their taste and habits of thinking during the last fifteen years of the eighteenth century. The external events and prevalent spirit of the time had a mighty influence upon the German literature; not only on the writers, but on the public. The public for which the German writers and poets laboured, consisted at the period before this, of a few particular friends and patrons of the arts, a few scattered dilettanti. Such was the public of Klopstock and his contemporaries, and it was long before the small band became increased. The revolution promoted reading and writing, and soon extended its influence over literature and philosophy quite as widely as over politics. However injurious in many instances its influence may have been, there is no question that it roused to an unexampled degree the public interest for all things, and that even the violence of party rage, like most other species of conflict, was advantageous to the development of human intellect. If I should characterise this epoch by a single word, I would call it the revolutionary one—protesting, however, against mistakes, and using the term in a sense not a little different from the common one. It is true, indeed, that to the honour of the German writers, the most distinguished of them at least, remained entirely free and pure from the democratic frenzy of the first years of the revolution. There is only one exception, and he, we must all allow, was not one of the deceivers, but one of the deceived. It was difficult at that period to resist the treacherous hopes which were everywhere held forth for acceptance, but such of our better writers as had been so deceived, soon returned to their right judgment, and did all they could to atone for their errors. I make use of the term rather in the same sense with that in the admirable saying, “Burke wrote a revolutionary book against the revolution.” The meaning of this is, that Burke painted with such a terrible eloquence the convulsions of the age, and so perfectly felt and understood the danger and the greatness of the existing struggle, that he himself was thrown into a state of agitation and con-

tagious violence when he composed his book. It is this state of an internal rather than of an external struggle, that I consider as the distinguishing mark and characteristic of the third generation. In order to make my meaning perfectly understood, I need only name one great poet and writer of this period, whose splendid career has already been brought to its close. Schiller, in the first enthusiastic writings of his youth, exhibits all the most striking symptoms of internal conflict, and breathes the full confidence of all those visionary hopes and violent opposition to existing institutions, which were the immediate harbingers of the revolution. In some of his early works he expresses a passionate and painful scepticism—an unbelief, which is accompanied in his young spirit with so much sublime earnestness and fire of energy, that we contemplate it not with aversion but with compassion, and with the hope that a soul so fearfully agitated and so panting for the truth, would, in its period of manhood and maturity, attain the repose of faith. What a mighty change do we observe in the subsequent progress of his career! what a dignified struggle with himself, the world, the philosophy of the age, and his own art! Restless in himself, and perpetually tossed about in unquietness, he comprehends and compassionates the universal convulsions of the time. It is this which I mean to express by the word I have adopted, for, in a greater or in a less degree, the remark I have made concerning Schiller applies to all the illustrious writers of his epoch.

The poets and other authors of the second generation lived in a state of carelessness, which appears to us very remarkable, accustomed as we are to trace in the events which occurred during their time, the seeds of all the subsequent agitations. In political events they took no sort of concern, and lived in a total contempt of the whole external world, existing only for themselves and the enjoyment of their own art. John Müller alone forms an exception; his spirit was entirely devoted to historical events, and looking down from the solitary elevation of his Alps, he saw further

into the gathering tempests of the political world than any of his brethren, inhabitants of the peaceful valley or the tumultuous capital. Instead of this artist-like and happy unconcern, the whole of the writers of the late generation, who appeared between the year 1780 and the year 1800, appear to be thoroughly penetrated with the spirit and feelings of their age; they either coincide in, or oppose, with the violence of partisans, the prevalent system of opinions. One of our writers, the most fertile of his age, creates the greater part of his interest by taking possession of the merciful and tolerant side of the time; and another much greater genius, going to the totally opposite extreme, thinks that in his favourite I he has discovered the *Πον Στω* of Archimedes. A third writer, who is the favourite of his age and nation, is so, because he has seized upon the whole wealth of this variously developed epoch, and represented all its dissonances and complaints with wit, sympathy, and a peculiar species of humour, in a style, the remarkable nature of which is of itself a sufficient proof that the period in which it was formed was a revolutionary one. Other authors, disgusted with the chaotic situation of actual affairs, betook themselves to the regions of mere fancy, or of pure science. A few made a wiser use of their experience, and returned with a sense of humility and submission to the aids of religion, and the long neglected sublimities of the Bible.

I cannot pretend to bring my history any further down, for I am sensible how impossible it must be for a man to depict a period to which he himself belongs. When an external struggle becomes universal in any department of human activity, the social as well as the intellectual, it is impossible that either party should be entirely in the right. Even they who have espoused the right cause will mingle something wrong in the feelings of their triumph. The creative influence of a period of convulsion may be sufficiently proved by a reference to the history of Schiller—what mighty spaces intervene between the Robbers, the Don Carlos, and the Wallenstein! Invention is certainly



more favoured by such a period than perfect finishing ; but many German works produced during these years exhibit both in a beauty which they can manifest only when they are united.

During this period the philosophy of Kant was at the height of its power in Germany. That its effects were injurious in respect to religion, I cannot upon the whole believe, for that had already been attacked in its more fundamental principles by adversaries much more fitted to produce a popular effect. If, in some respects, it fostered doubts, these doubts were of the more profound and serious nature, and carried their own antidote along with them. I do not mean to say any thing in favour of the mere faith of reason, but I maintain, that if the truth had been entirely lost, there are to be found in the writings of Kant many hints, by means of which a serious inquirer might have been greatly assisted in its recovery. If we reflect how generally a degrading infidelity had been received among the Germans, we shall easily admit that a more dignified system of infidelity must have been advantageous rather than pernicious. It is, no doubt, to be regretted, that the philosophy of Kant so soon became a sect. But even this was, like his corruption of our language, only a transitory evil. Kant's own style has the stamp of his character ; it is perfectly original, and displays much philosophical acumen, spirit, and wit. But, upon the whole, and particularly in his method of constructing periods, we can see evident marks of a soul toiling painfully after truth, and undergoing perpetual concussions from its doubts. Hence arose the unfortunate Terminology. But that barbarism, the cipher language of philosophy, has now in a great measure disappeared ; only a few of our better writers still make some use of it, and that from slovenliness. The best philosophical writings of later years are quite pure in respect of language.

In Kant's philosophy are to be found many of the defects of his predecessors in the seventeenth and eighteenth cen-

turies. He sets out with ideas of time and space quite as dead as those of Leibnitz ; like almost all other philosophers since Descartes, he wavers between the principle of personal consciousness and the external world of the senses, and he at last lands in the system of experience, like Locke. As this, however, is quite silent respecting all moral and divine things, he formed, in a manner not very consistent either with the spirit of the English philosopher, or with his own principles, a system of rational faith out of the scattered fragments of rational knowledge. This found no believers or followers. The Kantian doctrines of morality and law are indeed valuable, because they show exactly how far reason does enter into the formation of true morality and true law ; but they furnish an example even more striking than that of the Stoics, how inadequate, nay, in some instances, how pernicious, any system of ethics must be which rests upon no higher foundation than reason can afford.

The chief merit of Kant, in regard to this subject is, that he demonstrated the incapacity of pure reason to decide any thing at all respecting such subjects—that she can acquire some knowledge of God and divine things only by her power of gathering facts out of the experience of human life. Instead, however, of placing reason where he should, in the second place, he erroneously assigned her the first, and the ill-used name of faith, which he bestowed on her, was a very insufficient mask. Had he avoided this ancient error, and laid open the path to true knowledge, with that accuracy of which his genius was capable, he might have attained the great object of his ambition, and become to philosophy what Bacon has been to physics. He might have put an end for ever to verbal difficulties, and established religion upon the foundation of experience and science.

To explain at greater length the two main errors which have sprung from the philosophy of Kant, and to give you a general picture of the present philosophy of Germany, would carry me very far beyond the limits which I have for

the present prescribed to myself. Living poets who have already composed a series of great works, and finished their career before our eyes, may be taken into the historical picture of the latest period. Not so philosophers ; their ideas may yet assume a different form of development, their system is as yet *in futuro*. I shall only make this one general remark, that our country has been distinguished since Kant by a spirit of profound and patient investigation ; and that our philosophers have formed their own speculations with the advantages of a more extensive learning than has as yet been equalled in any other country of modern Europe. These are the best preparations and symptoms of a return from error to truth. Some have already made great progress in the removal of the errors which were bequeathed by Kant. I may be pardoned for mentioning the name of my own departed friend Novalis ;\* not that he was the first who returned to the right path, or that he has carried his views further than many others, but because the fragments which he has bequeathed to us are a sufficient proof that, had he lived, he would have done more for true philosophy than any of those whom he has left behind him. With a dignified simplicity and clearness, Slottberg expresses the loftiness of that faith, which not only gave repose to his feelings, but energy to his genius. Many approximations have been made, and are now making, to the truth. I hope that ere long the return will be universal, and the philosophy of Germany assume a shape in which she will be no longer the enemy and darkener, but the champion and torch-bearer, of the truth. At all times we should separate persons from opinions ; but, above all, we should beware of hating or distrusting philosophy in general, merely on account of the individual errors into which her adherents may have been betrayed. False philosophy can only be supplanted by the true. This consideration should quicken the energy and sustain the confidence of the age.

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I now turn to the poets—but I must confine myself to a very few remarks even concerning them. During this period the more mature works of Göethe first became known and admired, as they deserved to be, and many of them belong to it even by the date of their compositions. The best of them are now very generally admitted to be, both in respect to poetical art and beauty of language, the most excellent of which the German language can boast. This poet possesses, in an unequalled degree, that power and ease by which the writers of the second generation are distinguished. In some particular pieces his example might indeed be a misleading one ; for even in his maturer years he has too often brought down his poetry to the present ; and there is, indeed, perhaps no other poet who has bestowed so much art upon subjects entirely modern. But nothing can enable us to judge better of the difficulty of this whole undertaking than the simple comparison of his writings of modern representation with those poems of which the subjects are taken from periods more remote. How inferior is *Eugenie* to *Egmont*, considering both as poetical representations of the mode in which civil disorder and revolution are fostered and extended in the vulgar and in the cabinet. Or if we may be allowed to class together works externally of different species, on account of the kindred nature of their internal import, how superior is the *Tasso* to the *Affinities of Choice*, as a picture of the development of passion in the higher orders of society. If we look upon the last named work merely as a representation of the mind struggling with the world, (like the *Faustus*,) and compare it in that point of view with the *William Meister*, how greatly must it appear its inferior, both in respect to thought and style. If we look to the poetry alone, I imagine that these works, *Faustus*, *Iphigenia*, *Egmont*, and *Tasso*, will maintain in future ages the fame of this author, along with the most beautiful of his songs. In that mode of composition he has, in every period of his life, been alike admirable.

Many doubt whether Göethe was meant by nature for a

dramatic poet, and think that even in such of his pieces as are best adapted for the stage, as for instance in *Egmont*, the repose of his descriptive representations points out a poet whose tendency is rather to the epic. His attempts, however, in the epic, or in those species most nearly allied to it, have never been eminently successful. It seems as if he had never been able to light upon either a subject or form of epic composition exactly to his mind. His feelings led him more to the romantic than the proper heroic; the romantic, in the widest sense of the word, when it affords play alike for fancy, wit, feeling, and observation, seems to be indeed the proper sphere of this great poet.

The influence which he exerted over his age was twofold, and such also appears to be his nature. In respect of his art, many have called him with justice the Shakespeare of our age—an age, namely, which leans more to riches of ideas and variety of cultivation, than to high perfection of art in any one department of poetry. In respect to his mode of thinking, as he has applied it to the concerns of actual life, our poet deserves his other appellation of the German Voltaire. A German he is in every thing; and even his mockeries, ironies, and unbelief, are expressed with a tone of goodheartedness, seriousness, and eloquence to which the French Voltaire was an utter stranger. The want of settled principle is indeed the defect which most frequently strikes us in the midst of all the polished elegance, exquisite irony, and profuse wit which this great poet has lavished over all the creations of his genius.

The unhappy relation of the German poetry to the German stage, is apparent from this circumstance, that both Klopstock and Göethe have written many dramas which they never meant for representation; although some of the pieces of Göethe, so composed, have, at a subsequent period been brought upon the stage. The same circumstance occurred with respect to the *Don Carlos* of Schiller; and after he had resisted all the seductive influence of his first success, he has not been able to produce so much effect by

the more dignified exertions of his art. But even although there remains some want of harmony between his poetry and our stage, still he was the true founder of our drama. He gave it its proper sphere, and its most happy form. He was thoroughly a dramatic poet; even the passionate rhetoric which he possessed along with his poetry, belonged exactly to this character. His historical and philosophical works and attempts are only to be considered as the studies and preparations of a dramatic artist. Yet his philosophical tracts are very valuable, from the light which they afford us into his internal spirit, and the proof they give of his want of mental harmony. A doubting, sceptical, unsatisfied disposition seems to accompany his spirit in all its inquiries. He himself appears to have remained always at the very threshold of doubt, and even in the noblest and most animated of his works we are chilled by the breath of an internal coldness.

Some have been of the opinion, that Schiller's philosophical pursuits were injurious to him, even in respect to his own art. But, in truth, his infidelity had its origin at an earlier period, and the satisfying of a spirit such as his was a matter of greater moment than any thing which regards the mere finishing of an art. And even with a view to the drama, I think that the historical and philosophical turn which Schiller has given to some of his tragedies, is by no means deserving of censure. Our theatre is not to flourish by means of voluminous authors; but, like those of Greece, England, and Spain, by means of profound thought and historical import. At one period of his life, Schiller seems indeed to have entertained some false notions respecting the essence of the ancient tragedy, but this we must consider merely as a proof that he had not at that time brought the studies which he pursued so earnestly to their proper termination.

The same lofty ideas of tragedy which Schiller entertained were also held by Henry Collin. So intensely was his spirit imbued with the inspiration of patriotism, that even

when he treats of subjects of antiquity, he is always a national poet.

I feel that I have now reached the termination of the picture which I undertook to unfold. The multitude of circumstances which pressed upon me, and the interest which I took in the representation of the middle age, have abridged me in the latter part of my labours. I have done little more in these last lectures but point out the names of men upon whose works I should have dilated with much more fullness, both for your sake and for my own. In regard to German literature, if I had not confined myself to very narrow limits, each several province or department might easily have occupied a space as considerable as that which I have devoted to the whole.

I see plainly that a new generation are arising and fashioning themselves, and that the nineteenth century will be no less distinguished in the history of German letters than the eighteenth has been. But the spirit and tendency of this young generation are not yet so much developed that I can venture to give any certain opinion as to its character. Much will be expected from them, for great things have been done to prepare the way for them. If we are to speak of the whole body of German literature, I do not hesitate for a moment to say, that I expect all our most sanguine expectations will, at no very distant period, be fulfilled. At present, I see much both of false taste and affectation in our art and poetry. The imitation of the antique, and of the great men of the preceding age, is conducted on narrow principles. Even in philosophy we have not borrowed the best part of those who have gone before us. But I hope that ere long all these things will exist only in remembrance. If the times proceed as they have lately done, literature will soon become much less the concern of individuals than of the public, and the influence of readers upon authors will at least be as great as that of authors upon readers. Since the middle of last century, literary works and literary men have assumed a totally new character in Germany, more so than



in any other country of Europe. The greater the number of spectators is, the more is the interest in the spectacle ; and I know not that any literature can be inspired more favourably than by the constant contemplation of such a spirit and nation as our own.

Even the spirit of sectarianism, however deeply it has been implanted among us, has of late years been visibly on the decline. Of those sects which in the last half of the eighteenth century had most influence in Germany, and on that account, if on no other, are historically of some importance, the illuminati sunk into the background, at the first appearance of the more profound philosophy ; the Kantians have now begun to be as weary of their own system as the world was before them, and even the natural philosophers have become split into so many parties that they can scarcely be said to form any longer a particular sect. I am far from flattering myself that the errors of any one of these systems no longer exist, but they do not show themselves in the same imposing form as before. The spirit of sect has become milder ; scholastic forms have sunk into comparative contempt, and all parties prepare to labour in unison on the great work of developing the intellect of Germany.

It is scarcely necessary for me to recall to your recollection that our literature, even from the first epoch of its development, has been in a state of perpetual contest and struggle. At first the conflict lay between the Swiss, who admired exclusively the poetry and criticism of England and antiquity, and the Saxons, who were the professed worshippers of the literature and taste of France ; then between the serious and playful poets, the followers of Klopstock and those of Wieland ; and in another department, between the orthodox party, and the new sect of illuminati. The contest assumed a more serious appearance in the time of the Kantian philosophy, as a regular struggle between idealism and empiricism. Both of these last combatants have in a certain sense gained the victory. Empiricism has with

justice become the ruling system in all that regards practical life, physics, and pure science. Idealism, taking it in the highest acceptation of the word, as the system of those who recognise ideas as superior to sensation, has exerted a powerful and an abiding influence upon our art, our criticism, and our higher philosophy. We often hear men speak of the new school, and the golden age. I have already said that our literature has no proper golden age, and I acknowledge I can as yet observe nothing that is deserving to be called a new school. We should be ambitious to perfect what has been begun, not to show our invention at the expense of our judgment. Another foolish enmity which has become forgotten, is that which subsisted between the literary men of the North and of the South of Germany. We were never so sensible of our national identity as now.

If we consider the remarkable struggles of intellect which occurred during the last century, in a more general point of view—as they developed themselves, not in Germany alone but in England, in France, and in the whole of Europe—and ask for a merely historical solution of this great phenomenon, the following is probably the conclusion at which we should arrive. This struggle has had its seat not in those persons and events alone wherein it has been manifested to us, but rather in a great internal awakening throughout the whole intellect of man.

The wild wanderings of reason and power of thought, set free from all control, and then the reviving of imagination, which had so long slept beneath the pressure of a formal and (apparently only) a scientific system, were probably the moving causes of all these manifold convulsions and conflicts. In France despotic and contemptuous reason renounced all the bonds of faith and love, and displayed its destructive influence upon the external life and manners of a nation, in a way which has furnished us and our posterity with a warning and a terrible example. In Germany, from the different character of the nation, the spirit of the time manifested itself not in bloody revolutions, but in the en-

tangled warfares of metaphysicians. The regeneration of fancy has in more countries than one shown itself in the revived love of old traditions and romantic poetry. To the extent and depth, however, wherein this love has been kindled among the Germans, no other nation of Europe can furnish a parallel. They have had their time, it is fit that we should now have ours.

Were I called upon to select one example of the prevalent power and freedom of reason, of the endless rapidity with which strong spirits weaken, destroy, and recreate the structure of thought, I should fix upon none more readily than Fichte; not merely on account of power of invention and masterly management of thought, which are in so high a degree peculiar to him, but also because he takes the materials of his thoughts entirely from himself, trusts everything to nature, and depends in nothing upon those who have gone before him. The corresponding energy in the exertions of imagination—the resurrection, as I might call it, of fancy in Germany—cannot be more strongly exemplified than in Tieck, a poet who is so perfectly master of all the depths, and observations, and wonders, and mysteries of his art.

So far have reason, and imagination, and the century advanced; but as yet no further. We must not, however, forget, that unless we retrograde, we must of necessity proceed. To this profoundness of reason which we have attained, and this fulness and majesty of fancy which have been restored to us, there must yet be added that stableness of will and purpose which brings the seeds of good to maturity, and guards them from the first encroachments of corruption. The clearness of an enlightened judgment must watch over those mighty energies of reason and of fancy. True judgment depends in all things upon universality of observation, and discernment of that which is right, in the midst of much more that is wrong.

I have endeavoured in these lectures, to lead you to a point of view from which all our literature and all the ope-

rations of our intellect should be surveyed; as in all my more early attempts, my object has been to discriminate between the good and the evil, without any ambition to display those arts of rhetoric which might have pleased your ears, but could not have aided your judgment.

THE END.

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